



DROWSY

J.A. MITCHELL



Fantasia . 85



BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE SUMMER SCHOOL OF PHILOSOPHY
AT MT. DESERT

THE ROMANCE OF THE MOON

THE LAST AMERICAN

"LIFE'S" FAIRY TALES

AMOS JUDD

THAT FIRST AFFAIR

DR. THORNE'S IDEA

THE PINES OF LORY

THE VILLA CLAUDIA

THE SILENT WAR

PANDORA'S BOX

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"A FANTASTIC, SOLEMN REGION" Page 208

DROWSY

By

John Ames Mitchell

*Author of "The Last American," "Amos Judd,"
"Pines of Lory," "Pandora's Box," etc.*

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY
ANGUS MACDONALL AND THE AUTHOR



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To the Reader

This is not a fairy tale.

The wonders of to-day, we are told by scientists, will be to-morrow the common things of daily life.

Wireless telegraphy, it appears, is but the crude beginning to a deeper knowledge of the mysteries that surround us. Waves of thought, like waves of light, obedient to our will, may supplant the spoken word and the written message.

And we learn that Space, the borderless abyss through which we move, is vibrant with electric life. But still unsolved is the mystery of the force that holds the moon, for instance, to its orbit around the earth. And it holds it with a mightier power than bars of steel.

If it be true that the human voice goes out into space, on and forever, as other waves, why should not a lover on a nearby planet receive the message from an earthly maiden? If waves of thought keep pace with waves of light, the call of a human heart would surely reach him.

This tale of Drowsy is the somewhat romantic narrative of a woman and a reckless lover. An unusual lover, to be sure, with a singular inheritance; but very human—and with a full equipment of human faults

and virtues. While his achievements may seem to us incredible, the coming generation may regard them as commonplace events.

It was Pliny, the elder, who said, "Indeed, what is there that does not appear marvelous when it comes to our knowledge for the first time?"

So, if this story of Drowsy seems a fairy tale, let us remember that the Atlantic Cable would be a fairy tale to Columbus.

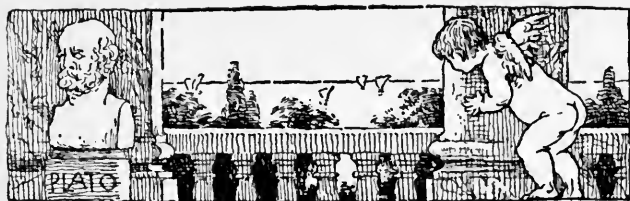
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DROWSY



I

THEIR OWN AFFAIR

BREATH of Scandal.

Imperishable zephyr! Dispenser of delight to all:—save those it touches. Floating in playful sport around the globe, it does little harm to callous sinners. But it blights, with a special and vociferous joy, superior persons.

The higher and more immaculate the victim the greater the general mirth. In the wake of pleasure it may have, at times, a comic side; at other times it kills—and with agonies that are not for publication.

In a certain month of May it loitered up the eastern shore of the Adriatic, lingering briefly at Rovigno, just long enough to nip the budding romance of an interesting widow. At Orsera it electrified the leading citizens by linking, in a gentle whisper, the name of a lady of spotless reputation with a Platonic Friend. It spared Parenzo. But at Cittanuova it fanned into flame a general curiosity regarding the relations of a

Captain of Cavalry with the wife of a certain careless husband. At S. Lorenzo it merely put two lovers on their guard.

Then onward for Trieste. In this search for savory victims it overlooked a villa high up a hillside. Here, indeed, the Breath of Scandal might have entered and rejoiced! But the villa, as if guarding against this very visitor, had drawn before its face a screen of trees and vines and flowers. As wise old Bumble takes his morning nectar from the choicest flowers, so here might this fateful zephyr have drunk his fill.

There was mystery about this villa.

Natives, whose business brought them in the vicinity, were enchanted by the beauty of a woman's voice. In melody and in power it was, to them, a revelation. Two middle-aged gentlemen—one of them the Curé of S. Pietro in Selve—both lovers of music and who attended operas at Milan and other cities heard the celestial voice one day when passing near the villa. They were charmed. Both knew it was no ordinary singer. But the singer's identity was not discovered.

On this particular morning a young man was sitting alone in the Loggia of the villa. Westward, through one of the open arches, he gazed upon the deep, blue waters of the Adriatic, far down below. Small boats, with sails of various colors, floated here and there, like lazy butterflies. The man was reclining in an easy chair like an invalid—which he was. Bandages encased his throat. A bullet through his neck, two months ago, would explain these bandages. It was

the price he paid for striking an Austrian officer across the mouth. The Austrian officer had made an offensive remark concerning the Diva. The young American was a good shot and in the duel, three days later, he sent a bullet through his adversary's chest. It so happened that the Austrian, being also a good shot, sent a corresponding missile through the young American's neck. Then the Diva and her defender had fled to this villa; not together, but separately, to escape the Breath of Scandal. Here, in this ideal nest, they found peace and privacy. Not under their own names. Ah, no! If the lady's identity were suspected the thrilling news would have circled the globe. One cannot be an opera singer of world-wide fame and suddenly become obscure. The Diva's Italian friends and the public believed that she was rustivating somewhere, with relatives. The American's friends in Paris had heard about the duel, but knew nothing of his whereabouts. So, alone and happy, here on this Istrian hillside, they laughed at Mrs. Grundy, and lived and loved at leisure. And what sweeter victory than looking down from a perch of safety upon the world below where the Breath of Scandal spared neither the guilty nor the innocent? Kind providence had so managed that the Diva's immediate family was not inquisitive. It consisted solely of her father, a famous scientist, whose portrait, with its high forehead, shaggy hair and drowsy eyes was a familiar face to Italian students. So absorbed he was in study and experiment that the adventures of his yet more famous daughter

caused him no uneasiness. Had the Breath of Scandal entered his laboratory, it would have been ignored—or ejected as a liar. The Diva's husband—known as “The Calamity” by her friends—a handsome gentleman of noble family, had long since become immune to the Breath of Scandal—so well encased in his disrepute that he could sink no further. He and the Breath of Scandal were boon companions. At present he held a government position in Siam. Three years he had been there, and might remain for ten years more. So, at the cozy Istrian villa were no jealous eyes to disturb a lover's dream.

On this May morning, too warm, perhaps, in the sunshine, but perfect in the shade, the American, in his reclining chair, was listening to a singing voice. It came to him from an inner room of the villa. Dreamily he listened, with half closed eyes, and smiling mouth. It had been rather a handsome face before the duel. Now the features were too sharp, and the eyes showed lack of sleep. This old Hungarian song—a mother's prayer, now coming from the Diva's lips, and heart—was her lover's favorite, and her own. It was given with the depth of feeling and the art of a great singer, herself soon to be a mother. There are things in music, often the simplest songs, that stir the imagination and reach the secret chamber of the soul beyond all others. This Hungarian prayer was one. It had become, to these two people, a hymn of hope, with its love and fears, its yearnings and its joy. And into it the Diva gave her very soul.

The song ended. Then, with eyes still moist, the Diva walked out into the loggia.

A pleasant thing to look upon, this goddess of the ravishing voice. There seemed bewitchment in her figure, in her carriage, in her head and neck, in the low, wide brow with its blackest of black hair. Beneath the heavy lashes of the midnight eyes lurked tragedy. Their mysterious depths disturbed the hearts of men. Yet her lips told more of mirth. Certain critics maintained that her greatest triumphs were in comedy. But as nearly all grand opera is for tragedy she rarely appeared in lighter rôles. This morning, as she stepped out into the loggia, she could have passed for almost any heroine—either of tragedy or comedy. Her robe, a thing of light material, might be any shade or color; perhaps a delicate purple ground with a smiling yellow pattern—or vice versa; so artfully designed that the outlines of her figure became elusive.

She bent over, kissed the invalid, and pressed a cheek against his face. Then she straightened up and stood beside him, looking down with a smile that was more than friendly. The invalid returned the smile. It was an easy thing to do. For what is easier than returning the smile of a singing goddess vainly sought by other men, when she descends from pinnacles of glory—and freely, joyfully surrenders herself, and all from an overpowering love? In the smile that lingered between them were things whose utterance is not in words of any language:—things that true lovers, and they alone, can ever know. Close beside him she

drew a wicker chair, and she sat in silence for a moment, studying his face. Earnestly she looked into his eyes as if searching his secret thoughts.

Flowers may be the language of love, but in this case it was also French. The Diva was Italian and her French was more than good. And Dr. Alton's French, for an American, was not so very bad. But since the leaden messenger had entered his neck three months ago, he had spoken no word, of French, nor of any other language. It was still a question whether he would regain his voice or be forever mute. And in those three months of ceaseless devotion there had come to the Diva an amazing gift. So intense had been her desire to know his thoughts, so persistent her efforts to know what his silent lips would utter, that at last the wish was granted. A mysterious power had come: a power that transferred to her own brain—or soul—the thoughts his lips could not express.

The conversation to an eavesdropper would have seemed a monologue by the lady, with long pauses. In these pauses she was reading her lover's thoughts. The young man's pleasure in these gazings was even greater than the Diva's. Within her eyes, themselves an entrancement, he found love and infinite devotion. Under their spell he asked no greater joy than opening wide the secret chambers of his soul.

"Did the little blond hero happen to notice how I finished the prayer song this morning?"

The little blond hero—who was some inches taller than the Diva when on his feet—nodded. He nodded

slowly and carefully in consideration of the bandaged throat.

"And that it was a little different from the way I usually sing it?"

Again the answer was a careful nod.

"How did he like it? Is it better that way?"

This time, after the faint, affirmative sign, she gazed longer into the adoring eyes, waiting a less simple answer. She found it, and with no aid from his lips.

"Yes, that was my idea precisely. More strength in the final passages; the deeper feeling of a mother's appeal." Then, with closed eyes and clasped hands: "May the prayer be answered, for my whole soul is in it!"

On the clasped hands the invalid laid one of his own, with a gentle pressure, telling of sympathy, hope and confidence. She opened her eyes and returned his smile. "Yes, yes. We must be cheerful; always cheerful and full of hope. It will be better for the child."

After a silence, in which both looked thoughtfully over the tree tops, toward the distant coast of Italy, beyond the butterfly sails far below moving here and there on the shimmering surface of the Adriatic, she turned, in response to another pressure of the hand, and again looked deep into the patient's eyes.

"No, Dr. Cervini says there's no harm in my singing unless I fatigue myself. And I never do that."

But his face was anxious. So with an air of cheerful confidence she exclaimed:

"I have decided on a boy. Yes, a boy! Smile again. I love to see you smile. Why a boy? Because boys are stronger and bigger than girls; more reasoning; more honest. What? Not so lovable as girls. Oh, nonsense!"

Here a pause.

"I don't quite understand. Think that again.—Oh, well, I shouldn't mind if he was. I love bad boys. Of course we don't want a cowardly, mean-spirited, stingy, cold-blooded, deceitful kind of badness."

Here, after another pause, she laughed. "Yes, I suppose that is just what I do mean—a bad boy who is good."

Another silence, and another laugh. "No, never!" "But tell me, Defender of Women, why do you wish for a girl? Because what? She might be a perfect copy of myself? Oh, honey-mouthed humbug!"

She rose, stooped over, kissed him, and sat down again.

"Well, I shall be happy, very happy, whatever the Bon Dieu gives us."

The next silence was longer.

"Yes, that is all very true. Heredity counts. There's no doubt of that. Half Italian, half American—there are worse combinations. But I am doubtful about the American half." Here she frowned and slowly shook her head. "I have a torturing suspicion that all Americans—with one heavenly exception—are ignoble things."

The blond hero smiled and closed his eyes.

"Not an opera singer in the whole country," she went on. "No music, no art, no Roman ruins; just a race of handsome, reckless, blood-thirsty young doctors. And the whole miserable wilderness, the whole continent itself, was discovered by an Italian! Think of that! Think of how much we owe Columbus, you and I! Were it not for him we should never have met—for you would not exist. You owe everything to Italy. Still, we love each other just as much. That is the important thing. Nothing else really matters." But she frowned and shook a finger. "Nevertheless, if it's a boy I shall name him Columbus Michael Angelo Dante Victor Emanuel Alton, just to hide the dishonor of his father's nationality."

The invalid clasped the finger, and held it. For a moment two pairs of eyes looked deep into each other. Then the Diva laughed. "What ideas you have! The Good God gave you a sunny heart, my beloved. And you know—Oh, you know well—that whatever——"

At the sound of a distant door bell she stopped abruptly. Into her face came a look of mild alarm. Both knew that no visitor was welcome. Who could enter this bower unless shadowed by the Breath of Scandal? The next moment, however, her face brightened. "Oh—of course! It's the good Dr. Cervini. I had forgotten he was to come early to-day."

The man who entered kissed the tips of the Diva's fingers. Then he shook hands with the American.

Tall, thin, of brown and leathery skin, with a prom-

inent Roman nose, fierce mustaches and pointed iron gray beard, he could easily have passed for Don Quixote. But the fierce mustaches failed to hide the lines of mirth about the mouth. And from two calm eyes beneath the threatening eyebrows gleamed sympathy and benevolence. It was generally believed that Dr. Cervini had ushered into the world more princes and princesses, more grand dukes and duchesses, more future kings and queens than any man in Europe. In those cases where there might be a question as to the propriety of the little one's arrival, he was more than trustworthy. In such affairs the Silence of the Tomb, compared with Dr. Cervini, was noisy gossip.

After various questions concerning the patient's progress he exclaimed:

"What patience, what godlike self-control are exhibited by Dr. Alton! Younger and more up-to-date than I, with a perfect knowledge of the human throat, yet he submits to my advice and antiquated treatment! Medals should be his!"

Dr. Alton, of course, protested, in silence, and the silent protest was put in words by the Diva. So ran the conversation for a time, Dr. Cervini watching the Diva with deepest interest.

"Do you realize, Signora," he said at last, "that you have developed a most extraordinary faculty?"

"Is it so very remarkable?"

"It is, indeed! In all my experience, and you know it covers many years, I have seen nothing quite like it. Hypnotism, mental telepathy and the old familiar

tricks are very different matters. In your case a sound mind in a sound body merges itself in closest communication with another mind, equally sound and normal. I am wondering if you could still read the doctor's thoughts if there was no common language between you. Or is it his unspoken words that you read?"

The Diva reflected. "No, it is not his words. I feel sure I should know his wishes even if there were no such things as words." Then, turning to her lover: "Tell me, wicked one, do you have to think in words when we talk together?—No, he says not."

"An amazing faculty!" murmured Dr. Cervini. "I have never seen nor heard of such a case. You two, as I understand, can carry on an endless conversation, and without a word from him."

"Yes, except, sometimes, names of people or of places. Then, if I don't know them, he writes them for me."

"Could you read the thoughts of another person, do you think? Of others, beside our invalid, here?"

"Oh, I am sure I don't know! I never tried. It's a terrible thought. Could anything be more frightful than to know, at times, what people really thought of you? No, no, Heaven forbid!"

Dr. Cervini laughed. "Oh, you would have little to fear on that score!" Then, tapping the hand of the invalid, "But you and I, Doctor, we professional sinners!—well—that would indeed be humiliating! Our crosses would be heavy!"

The invalid smiled, then looked at the Diva. And the Diva laughed, blushed and shook her head.

"What does he say?"

"It's too foolish to repeat. He's a silly boy."

"I insist upon knowing."

"He says——. No, no. I couldn't repeat it! His brain is affected. His blond wits are wandering."

Dr. Cervini frowned and looked his fiercest. "What manners! Secret messages in the very presence of a guest!"

"Well—he says the unspoken thoughts of a grateful world might intoxicate me, and he doesn't enjoy drunkards."

Dr. Cervini laughed. "No, you are mistaken, Doctor. She has already survived that test. No living conqueror has sailed in triumph on such seas of glory. No other queen or goddess has achieved her victory without losing something of the simplicity, the freshness and the charm of youth. The hearts of men are hers. To entrance the world, to——"

"Stop! Stop!" Again the color came to her cheeks. "If you said it too often, I might believe it, and then—adieu to all simplicity."

The two men protested—each in his own manner—against all denials of their sincerity.

More serious conversation followed. Dr. Cervini, after final instructions for the patient, departed, the Diva going with him to the outer door. As usual at these partings, she pressed him for an honest opinion

of the patient's condition. And, as usual, it was favorable.

She laid a hand on his arm. "You are telling me the truth, aren't you, old friend?"

"Yes. On my honor. In a fortnight he shall eat and drink and talk in comfort. Believe me. Now, now! No tears! I know what a strain it is. You have been simply magnificent all through these weary weeks. Don't weaken now. The worst is over."

"Yes, I will be brave. But the hardest of all is to see him suffer. He never complains. He tries so hard, so hard, to be cheerful! It seems, at moments, as if I could bear it no longer."

"Go away for a week or two. I can bring an excellent nurse."

"No, no! Never that!"

"Then remember the child. It must not come into the world with the face of a tragic mask; with weeping eyes and wrinkled brow."

She smiled and promised. But, after bidding him a cheerful good-by, and when the door had closed, she dropped into a chair and pressed both hands against her face. It was a determined effort to keep back the tears. They came, however; but the luxury was brief. With an air of somewhat fierce resolve she arose, stood just long enough before a mirror to dry her eyes, then, humming the gayest of airs from a comic opera, she went out into the loggia and rejoined the sufferer.

Meanwhile, Dr. Cervini descended the driveway of the villa to the postroad. There he stopped, leaned upon the parapet and looked down upon the scene below him; the little town at the foot of the hill, and the sky-blue Adriatic.

At the sound of an approaching carriage he turned. The approaching equipage was obviously patrician. It pertained to a lady of the High Nobility. Save the two men in livery on the box and the Breath of Scandal, this Countess was traveling alone. She and the Breath of Scandal were boon companions. This intimacy bore no resemblance to the corresponding intimacy among common people where purity is defiled, homes ruined and good names besmeared. With the Countess the Breath of Scandal became a sweet perfume—wafting around her person an intriguing atmosphere of mystery, romance and patrician vice.

Friendly greetings passed between the lady and the doctor. Then the lady asked for information. She suspected from something she had heard that the Diva was in this vicinity.

“Now, tell me, Doctor. Where is she?”

“She? In this vicinity?”

“Come now, I am not to be deceived. You may as well tell me at once. Where is she? You are one of her intimates and I saw you come down that avenue. As the only truthful man in Austria, you may as well confess that she lives at the end of it.”

The truthful man raised his Mephistophelean eyebrows, smiled and slowly shook his head. “Alas, I

wish, indeed, she were there! There is a villa, Countess, but no Diva in it."

The lady frowned. "Who then?"

"Nobody you know, or are likely to know. The occupant is a deservedly prosperous manufacturer of excellent chocolate."

"Are you sure?" In her manner was suspicion, not quite allayed.

"Well—I have spent the last hour there—and many previous hours."

"Very likely. But I don't believe you."

"Am I a liar?"

"I really don't know."

"But you just said I was the only truthful man in Austria."

"Merely a form of speech. I meant relatively. You might be the most truthful man in Austria and yet have no standing in heaven—or any other honest resort."

Dr. Cervini smiled. "True, too true! But who told you our Diva was here about?"

"A connoisseur. A judge of voices. One who could not be mistaken. He heard her voice one evening, here, along this road."

"Was he sure it was the Diva?"

"Absolutely."

"Ah, now I understand. Delicious! Really, it's too good to keep to ourselves. If we could only interview him together, you and I!"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean my chocolate king has a young daughter, who sings. And she sings—yes—she sings well. But, vocally, she bears about the same resemblance to our Diva as a guinea chicken to a skylark."

"Could our connoisseur be quite such a fool as that?"

"A real connoisseur can be anything. But possibly he had dined too well on that particular night. However, even when sober a musical critic can——" He stopped abruptly, with a gesture of annoyance. "Oh, what a memory! My humblest apologies to our connoisseur. He was right, absolutely right. He made no mistake."

"Then she is here, after all?"

"No, she is far from here. But I had entirely forgotten, for the moment, that she passed this way not so long ago. In the town below there, she lingered a day or two on her way to France."

"Is she in France?"

"Yes, for the summer;—and for rest."

"What part of France?"

"Ah, that, Countess, I must not tell."

"But I am one of her oldest friends! Am I not even to correspond with her?"

"Well, you know her one object in going there is for absolute rest, not even writing letters. I see you are hurt, dear lady, and I understand your feelings, but I am sworn to secrecy."

The lady stiffened, and settled back in the carriage. "Hurt! I should say so. And why not, pray?"

Dr. Cervini seemed to reflect a moment. "Well, Countess, will you give me your solemn word of honor to guard the secret if I tell you?"

"I promise."

"Do you happen to know the town of Tarbes?"

"No."

"Have you ever been to Foix?"

"Never heard of it."

"Well, she has rented a little villa somewhere between those places, but back in the mountains."

"What mountains?"

"The Pyrenees."

"God protect us! Is she there?"

"She is. Her doctors and her family all insisted upon her having a six months' rest. And she needs it."

"Provoking! Most annoying! And here I have had a long drive beneath a broiling sun—and all for nothing."

Dr. Cervini waved a solemn finger. "Don't forget your promise."

Yes, I will remember. But, the young American doctor who struck—and then killed a captain. Where is he?"

"In his own country."

"In America?"

"Even so."

"Shameful! Shameful!"

"Why shameful, Countess?"

"Because I hoped they were together—as they should

be. It's too delicious a romance for the lovers to spoil by parting."

"Lovers! She hardly knew him. If a favorite prima donna were to adopt every man who fell in love with her she would have no time for music. Heavens! What a regiment of followers!"

"Nevertheless," said the lady, in a more serious manner, "I blush for the Diva."

"Why blush?"

"I always blush for virtue."

As the carriage, with the Countess, escorted by the Breath of Scandal, disappeared around a curve in the road, Dr. Cervini removed his hat, looked heavenward and murmured:

"Angels of mercy, forgive a liar."

But the lie did well. Never again came the Breath of Scandal so near the Diva. The lovers' secret remained a secret. Even her father, the famous scientist with the drowsy eyes, died twenty years later not knowing that he had a grandchild.



II

HOW THE ACQUAINTANCE BEGAN

SEVEN years have passed.

Under the arching elms in a Massachusetts village, one Sunday morning in July, various persons were moving toward a house of worship. The house of worship was white, with a portico of Ionic columns.

Among the branches of the elms a noisy congregation of non-sectarian birds seemed to be laughing at the Orthodox bells.

Dr. Alton, leading his little son by the hand, was walking beside the parson. Dr. Alton was but little over thirty years of age. His son was nearly seven. When the older physician died, two months ago, this younger Dr. Alton, his only child, had returned from Europe and announced his intention of continuing his father's practice. Why an attractive young man, shining with honors from the medical schools of Paris

and Vienna, should be willing to hide his talents in a village like Longfields was an interesting mystery. Some argued that the death of his young wife had broken his heart and killed ambition. But this morning, as he walked to church, beneath the singing elms, he took cheerful notice of the things about him. He enjoyed the greetings of old friends of his boyhood.

Some yards behind, in this progress toward the church, came Mr. and Mrs. David Snell. Mr. Snell was listening to the discourse of his wife. He listened with the patience and the fortitude attained by long experience and by force of will. His beard was gray, his eyes were blue, his shoulders narrow and his figure slight. Also, he had a gentle voice and gentle manners. But it was known among his friends that this gentleness was by no means a manifestation of any inward weakness. While patient and much enduring, there were times when he became more determined, more "cantankerously sot" and unchangeable than the movements of the planets. Deacon Babbitt once said, "Compared with David when he gets his dander up the Rock of Ages is a weather-cock. The only safe thing to do is to stand from under and let him be." But these transformations were rare, and often forgotten.

"I don't care," Mrs. Snell was saying, "people have a right to gossip when a handsome young man comes home from Europe with a child like that and refuses to open his mouth about its mother. I don't believe it *had* a mother."

"P'r'aps not. P'r'aps it grew on a pumpkin tree and the doctor jest picked it."

"You know what I mean, David. We never heard of his being married durin' those six years he was over there—over there studyin' medicine. Studyin' medicine! I guess he studied a good many things besides medicine."

"Been a fool if he hadn't. Medicine ain't the only interestin' thing in this world."

"Don't be coarse, David, and excusing vice. You know very well he should not deceive people about it."

"How has he deceived anybody?"

"By saying he was married to this boy's mother—and she died."

"Well, ain't it true?"

"No."

"How do you know it ain't?"

"Because if it was true he wouldn't be so secretive about it. There's nothing to be ashamed of in marrying an honest woman and having a child."

"No," said Mr. Snell. "Nuthin' specially surprisin' about that. Good folks have done it."

"Then why be hidin' something? All his old friends are naturally interested in his wife and he'd naturally tell us—unless there was something he was ashamed of."

"Ashamed of? Well, Rebecca, you certainly can talk like a fool when you put your mind on it."

Mrs. Snell flushed. "Really! Indeed! So you

think it's perfectly natural for a man to hide from his old friends all knowledge of his marriage—as he would a murder?"

"Yes, if he wants to."

"Well, I don't. And that's the difference. And we'll see what other people in this village are going to think about it."

Mr. Snell stopped, laid a hand on his wife's arm and wheeled her about. He spoke in a low voice, but his words were metallic in their clearness. "Now look here, Rebecca Snell, you jest go slow on startin' that kind of talk. Dr. Alton's a good man. We are mighty lucky to have him in the old doctor's shoes. Longfields is a mighty small village for a man with such an education as he's got. And if it ever got to his ears that you'd been insultin' his dead wife's memory—well—you'll get jest exactly what you deserve, and I'll help give it to yer. I mean it. Now shut up."

Mrs. Snell glanced at the light blue angry eyes now looking steadily into her own. Between those eyes and her own face, a long and bony finger, quivering with anger, was moving slowly, to and fro. It came very near her face. She blinked, tightened her lips and took a backward step. Then her husband, in a low voice, husky with rage, the vibrating finger almost touching her nose, spoke once more.

"And you *stay* shut up!"

After a pause, just long enough for his message to be acknowledged by a nod of obedience he started on toward the church.

Mrs. Snell followed after.

In that congregation were persons who came to worship their Creator—the ostensible purpose of the gathering. Miss Susan Pendexter, on the other hand, a somewhat emotional spinster, came to worship the preacher, Rev. George Bentley Heywood. She was thrilled by the originality, the power and the beauty of the sermon which to his own wife seemed, as usual, prosy and commonplace. Many were present because afraid to stay away. Among these were the young men. Children, of course, were present under compulsion, accepting the sermon as a punishment.

No gathering could be more democratic. These descendants of the Pilgrims were not encumbered by class distinctions. Judge Dean, for instance, the most influential citizen of the village, would never presume to patronize either Abner Phillips, the harness maker or Elisha Bisbee, the blacksmith. Uncle Hector, who kept the store, would have snubbed all the reigning monarchs of the earth had he suspected them of willful condescension. The somewhat restless man in a side pew, he whose stiff hair stands straight on end, who snuffs and clears his throat and looks pleasantly around the church, is Lemuel Cobb, the stage driver. He is a descendant of a famous Governor of Plymouth Colony and has a brother who is now President of a Western College. And the two Allen “girls,” Nance and Fidelia—now over sixty—have one of the best pews in Church. The fact of their being largely dependent for food and clothing, rent and fuel, on the

bounty of their neighbors, lessens in no degree the courtesy they receive.

It was natural that Dr. Alton and his son, this morning, should be objects of lively interest. This interest was all the greater from certain unexplained events in Europe kindly referred to by Mrs. Snell. But other persons were less suspicious than this lady. Nearly all the members of the congregation—and of the township for that matter—were old friends of this Dr. Alton's father. Few among those here present failed to recall, with gratitude and affection, the dead physician. The older members he had either sustained in sickness or had postponed their departure to realms above. The younger ones he had ably assisted into our merry world. This younger Dr. Alton, now present, bore some resemblance to his father. He had a good expression and a pleasant smile, but he was, of course, too young to carry those deeper lines of study, of work and kindly deeds that marked his father's face.

So high were the backs of the pews that the smaller children were almost invisible. Only the tops of their heads were in sight. But Dr. Alton's son, for a wider knowledge of this new world, folded his short legs beneath him and sat upon his heels. This was welcomed—in silence—by many persons in the congregations. They could now satisfy their curiosity as to his appearance. And the face was disappointing. His eyes, as they moved in a drowsy way over the faces about him, seemed dull and almost stupid. They

seemed half closed by heavy lids. And his short, cherubic mouth might indicate a want of decision. His hair, short, thick and dark grew in a straight line across his forehead. Altogether, with his stiff hair, plump cheeks, short neck and placid manner, he seemed a different type from the little Yankee boys of Longfields.

Mrs. Waldo Bennett, the tall, straight woman with startled eyebrows, said to herself, as she watched his slow moving eyes, studying in mild surprise the church and the people about him, "That little heathen was never in a house of God before." But she was wrong. This was, to be sure, his first experience in a New England church, but he had been in cathedrals. And he was surprised at the difference in size between this cathedral and those at Milan and Canterbury. Leisurely, and with no embarrassment or self-consciousness, his eyes wandered slowly over various persons who were watching him. But when his eyes encountered Mrs. Snell they opened a trifle wider. There, in surprise, they rested for a moment. For in this lady's face he found, not the amiable curiosity of his grandfather's grateful friends, but a pious disapproval of his very existence. Almost threatening was her look of hostility, of reprobation and contempt. There was censure in it, and condemnation. She was studying him as one of the Higher Angels might study the meanest imp of Satan. For Mrs. Snell, while not impervious to the consolations of religion, found more solace, just at present, in believing Dr. Alton a special

envoy from Sodom and Gomorrah. As for the boy, she detected, in his evil eyes and voluptuous mouth, an agent of the devil for the future debauchery of Longfields. She was not especially prophetic in other matters but, for this boy, she predicted an unspeakable career.

And the boy, while unable to divine all her thoughts or to realize this blighting forecast, did not fail to catch the general message. For a moment he returned her gaze, calmly and undisturbed; then as calmly looked away. He was seeking refuge in the thought that perhaps she hated all other boys just as much. Perhaps the women in this new country were fiercer than those in Europe.

The very next minute, however, something happened—something so much more thrilling that he forgot completely the square jawed, ominous woman. As he looked away from her hostile glare he encountered the eyes of the parson's daughter. And such eyes! How different from Mrs. Snell's! These eyes were the two most astonishing things he had ever seen. They were not far away—in a pew at right angles to his own—and they were looking straight at him! They had thick, dark lashes. They, also, were severe, but in a different way from Mrs. Snell's. They certainly were frowning at him. From Mrs. Snell's eyes he felt like running away—for safety. These other eyes seemed more surprised than angry—as if demanding an apology for something. Although but six years old they were remarkably effective for

weapons with so little experience. Not that she was a flirt at that age: she was nothing more than a rather willful little girl, already somewhat spoiled: one of those clever females intended by nature to succeed, from the cradle up, in getting whatever they desire.

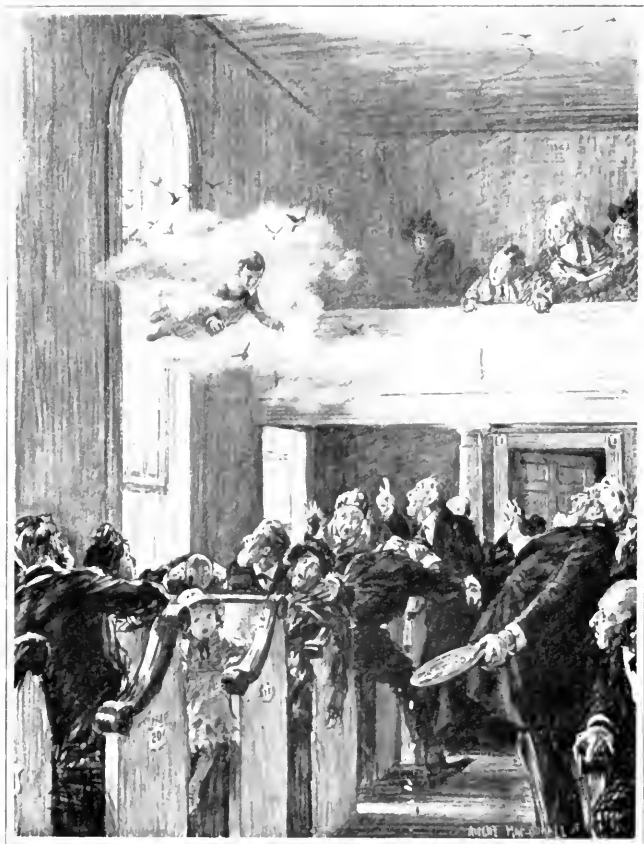
The boy's eyebrows went up and he smiled, involuntarily, in spite of her frown, and his slumbrous eyelids opened a little wider. He enjoyed beautiful things, in whatever form, and those eyes, whether hostile or friendly, were wondrous things. Then, when he had just begun to stare at them, comfortably, came one of the surprises of his life. It was more than a surprise: it was a blow, a shock, a humiliation. For, this girl, with no warning, made a face at him! She wrinkled up her nose, slightly raised her chin and stuck out her tongue. And, while he gazed in wonder, she unfolded the legs upon which she was elevated and sank from his vision like a mermaid beneath the waves. He was more astonished than angry. That such an affront, so undeserved, so undignified and so insulting should come from so angelic a face was something new in his experience. In his desire to see more of this novelty he forgot his surroundings, and to the surprise of neighboring worshipers, and before his father could stop him, he clambered to his feet and stood up on the seat of the pew.

Accelerated by his father's hand and by a whispered word, he came down to his proper level. But Mrs. Snell had seen the act. It strengthened her conviction that this future corrupter of youth had no

respect for the House of God, and was already dead to any religious influence. For a time the Corrupter of Youth kept his eyes on the place where the eyes had vanished; but in vain. They seemed to have disappeared forever. So, being a boy, he found interest in other things.

The tall windows of the church were open at the top, and those members of the congregation, not enthralled by the sermon, could see snowy clouds drifting idly across a bright blue sky. Through these open windows came the song of birds;—voices of the heathen birds already mentioned; good singers but with little reverence for the Gospel Word. To the Corrupter of Youth, also, the Gospel Word had little interest. He was looking up, through the open windows, at the floating clouds, the swallows and the white pigeons. One swallow, less discerning than his friends, flew into the church and fluttered about before escaping. He was followed, with envious eyes, by the Corrupter of Youth, who decided there and then—a decision often made before—that when he grew to be a man, and could do as he pleased, he also would fly:—up from the earth, high up into the clouds like a bird!

Perhaps it was the warm day and the preacher's voice, but after a while he began to feel sleepy. And, anyway, why should a bird be so much better off than men and other animals? Why stick so tight to the ground? It didn't seem fair. Why should a hen—just a hen—have wings and not a boy? If he him-



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self had wings—my gracious!—he would rise and sail up through the open window, up and far away above the clouds, into the blue sky itself! Among the gods and angels he would float around. And just to show what he could do, he would astonish them with extraordinary evolutions. For speed, originality and distance, his flights, with curves and sudden stops, would startle even sparrows themselves. There was pleasure, too, in swooping down, and showing his contempt for these heavy, easily satisfied persons all huddled together between the bare walls of this foolish little Longfields cathedral. Darting downwards, but in easy curves, to the very window through which he had been looking up and out, he now looked down and in. Hovering at the open window, his body without, his head within, he frowned upon the upturned, startled faces of the earth-bound congregation. Then he entered. Gracefully he floated over their heads. For a moment he hovered over Mrs. Snell, who uttered a loud scream, then fell dead from terror. Next, above the girl with the wonderful eyes he moved slowly to and fro, as fishes move in water. This just to show her what kind of a floating boy he was. Descending a little, until his face was close to hers, he looked straight into her startled eyes and wiggled his nose like a rabbit. And it frightened her almost to death!

'Twas a great thought!

He smiled as he reveled in it. But there are dreams too beautiful to be true. And when, at last, his soul

rejoined his body he saw the preacher had folded his hands upon the Bible in front of him, and was praying. The members of the congregation, with bowed heads, were listening in solemn silence. Then the dreamer, now wide awake, slid from his seat, stood up, put his mouth to his parent's ear and whispered:

"Father, quick! His eyes are shut. Let's get away!"

Parents can be dull. On this occasion his father certainly missed a golden opportunity. He merely shook his head and failed to act.

However, the weary service was almost over. The prayer ended; the congregation stood up and joined in the final hymn. The dreamer also stood up. Also, he opened his cherubic mouth, and sang. The words he knew not, but he sang without them. His unfamiliar voice surprised Miss Martha Lincoln, a middle-aged maiden just in front of him. Twice a week she gave music lessons in Worcester. Now, involuntarily she looked behind. Her surprise was great when she discovered the performer to be a small boy whose diminutive mouth could hardly open wide enough to put forth the music that was in him. Clearly this courageous singer possessed an ear and a sense of harmony that were a part of himself, and not acquired.

At last, the benediction finished, the people came slowly out of the pews into the aisle, and moved toward the open doors. Greetings occurred between people who lived miles apart and seldom met, except on

Sundays. The boy stuck close to his father. One of his hands kept a tight grip on Dr. Alton's coat. As the top of his head was not above the waists of people about him he received little attention. Many persons overlooked him. But just before reaching the vestibule he heard a voice close to his ear, on his own level. It said, distinctly, but in a tone too low for the taller people to hear:

"How do you do, little stupid?"

He turned. There was the girl with the wondrous eyes! But now the eyes glistened with malicious triumph. For an instant he was too surprised, too disconcerted, to grasp the situation. Like a ship that receives a raking broadside from an unexpected quarter and reels beneath the shock, but recovers and prepares for action, so Cyrus Alton pulled himself together, blinked and faced the foe. Then it was that the maiden herself received a shock. For this boy, instead of "sassing back" as she expected, inclined his head and body in a ceremonious bow—as elaborate as the skirts and legs of the surrounding grown-ups permitted, and inquired politely:

"Why do you say that?"

So surprised was the girl, so startled by this unprecedented, this unheard of politeness in a human boy, that her expression swiftly changed to one of comic dismay. She was dumb. The miracle stupefied her. In their wonderment the beautiful eyes became yet larger and more beautiful. But the lips were

speechless. Then, once again she vanished, this time behind her mother's skirt.

And that is how the acquaintance began between Cyrus Alton and Ruth Heywood.



III

UNCLE HECTOR'S VERDICT

IT so happened a few days later that this acquaintance was renewed. Cyrus, sitting on the doorstep of a house in the village, waited for his father, who was visiting a patient within.

Two little girls came along, arm in arm. They stopped in front of him.

One of them said: "A new boy."

The other said: "Isn't he funny!"

In one of these persons Cyrus recognized the girl who made faces at him in church. As they stood smiling, brimming over with mischief, he arose, lifted his hat and made a sweeping bow, as d'Artagnan might have saluted Anne of Austria. It was so well done, with so much grace and solemnity, that the two girls were startled. Things of that sort had never occurred in Longfields. The girls giggled. They believed he was "showing off" to amuse them. But he was not

showing off. It was merely his usual manner of saluting ladies. When the hat was again on his head, he looked calmly at the girl with the eyes and inquired :

"Why did you call me stupid?"

For an instant she was taken aback. Then with a smile of defiance :

"Because you *look* stupid."

"But I am not."

"Well you look so, anyway ; doesn't he, Martha?"

Martha nodded and giggled endorsement. But Ruth Heywood herself stopped giggling, and said more seriously :

"It's your eyes that are funny. They are half awake. They are so drowsy they make me sleepy to look at them. Can't you open them wider?"

Cyrus made no answer because he could think of nothing to say. But as the heavy lidded eyes looked into Ruth Heywood's, with their supernatural tranquillity, it seemed to the maiden as if the accumulated wisdom of mankind was rebuking and despising her. The same expression came into her face that came there in church ; a rapid change from bantering gayety to doubt and misgiving. But she wheeled about, with an air of indifference, and walked away, leading the devoted Martha. A little way off she turned her head and called to him :

"Good-by, Drowsy!"

With that they both scampered away as fast as they could run.

After this interview the acquaintance marched—or

rather jumped ahead—with all the velocity of youth. Cyrus passed her house every time he went to the village and interviews were frequent. All discourtesy in their first meetings was forgiven—and forgotten. To his ceremonious salutations, with their astonishing bows, Ruth Heywood soon became accustomed. Also, she ceased being impressed by his judicial gaze, for she soon learned that the heavy lidded eyes concealed neither disdain nor supernatural wisdom. She discovered, in short, that he was just a boy. But he proved neither sleepy nor stupid.

Certain traits, however, quite at variance with those in other children of her own age, made him an object of her special concern. She began to regard him as her own personal property, something to be watched over, guided and protected. Although she had known but six years of terrestrial life, some feminine, kindly instinct was already prompting her to be mother and grandmother to him, also aunt and sister and all the female blessings that he missed at home. He was, to be sure, just about her own age, but he was shorter and less assertive. And there certainly is—at times—a distinct advantage in being able to look down upon the person you are trying to impress.

When Ruth wanted a thing she wanted it very much, and at once. With strangers she always got it. Her beauty, combined with her manner—when she chose—were irresistible, it appeared, to all human males between the ages of ten and one hundred. She could smile the smile that routed reason and paralyzed all

powers of resistance. This smile, as she grew older, with the sensitive mouth and conquering eyes, never lost its charm. And the unsuspecting Cyrus was either brave or timid, patient or angry, happy or unhappy, at the witch's will.

Moreover, his mental processes were quite different from those of Ruth. He was slower in reaching conclusions. Her own swift decisions amazed him. She dazzled him at times, by a mysterious intuitive agency whose lightning turns he did not pretend to follow.

Cyrus, more than other boys, was a lover of beautiful things. Flowers, pictures, music, color, all gave him pleasure. In the presence of an American sunset he would sit in solemn adoration. To this lover of beautiful things Ruth's eyes were as windows of heaven. Into them he could look and wonder; quit the earth and imagine all things. They soothed and stirred his fancy like summer skies and solemn woods—or flowers and thunderstorms. And when they rested on him, in reproach, they filled him with delectable guilt.

Ruth and Truth were one and inseparable. Truth was part of herself. Truth and Cyrus, on the other hand, sometimes parted company. And they parted easily. Truth was a good thing—he knew that. But there seemed to be occasions when Truth and Wisdom did not pull together; when the immediate results were disastrous. When those moments came he preferred the exercise of his own wits; the triumphs of his own invention. And his invention was rich and ready.

On one occasion, when rebuked by his father for

telling a lie, he replied, after a moment's thought, and with earnest conviction:

"I don't see any fun in telling the truth all the time. Anybody can do it."

However, aside from this little matter of despising Truth, he was a reliable boy. He kept his promises. And it should be said in justice that, while an easy and successful liar, his mind was open to reason and he could be made to realize the sin and folly of his ways. His interview with Uncle Hector, for instance, showed a willingness to see the light.

Uncle Hector kept the store. He was seventy-five years old, tall, very erect, wore a green wig and was a bachelor. The wig was not really green, but certain tints of its original golden brown had changed, in the passing years, to a peculiar greenish yellow. His own original virtues, however, had not deteriorated. He was honest and true. Everybody liked him, and all the children called him Uncle. He wore dark clothes, and a stiff, old fashioned collar—a sort of dickey—for he had a hired man to do the rough work about the place.

Toward noon, one February day, Cyrus and Ruth entered the store. Uncle Hector was off at the further end talking with a customer:—Mrs. Bennett. Nobody else was there. While waiting for Mrs. Bennett to finish her business Cyrus and Ruth admired, as usual, the wonders about them, and inhaled the intoxicating air: an air heavy laden with odors of molasses and vinegar, of coffee, calico and oranges, of the spices

of Araby and the rubber boots of New England. On the top of the counter, which was on a level with the nose of Cyrus, lay a dollar bill. Cyrus saw it, and by standing on his toes he could reach over and take it—which he did. He held it in the fingers of both hands and drank in its beauties. Then he held it closer to Ruth's face, that she, too, might admire it.

"Just think!" he said. "A dollar is a hundred cents; we can buy a hundred sticks of that candy you like!"

Ruth had doubts of his ownership. Yet she considered the discoverer's feelings.

"But, Cyrus, it isn't yours."

"Yes it is!"

"Oh, no!"

"Yes. Findin's is keepin's."

Ruth had never heard this principle before, but she accepted it because it came from Cyrus. And Cyrus, this fortune in his fingers, felt as all men feel when raised, without warning, from poverty to wealth.

Mrs. Bennett departed and at last Uncle Hector towered behind the counter smiling down upon the two upturned, excited faces.

Well, Miss Ruth Heywood, and Mr. Cyrus Alton, what can I do for you this morning?"

Again Cyrus raised himself upon his toes, pushed the dollar bill as far over on the counter as he could reach, and exclaimed:

"A whole dollar's worth of that red candy with the white stripes!"

Uncle Hector's genial smile gave way, for a moment, to an expression of surprise.

"Where did you get this money, Cyrus?"

"Father gave it to me."

"Oh, Cyrus!" exclaimed Ruth.

The liar turned and looked at Ruth, not in anger at being exposed, but in a sort of calm amazement that so sensible a girl should ruin so good a plan. Ruth, however, was not the person to compromise with sin.

"Cyrus Alton! How *can* you say such a thing?"

Kindly but sadly Uncle Hector looked down upon the boy.

"Tell the truth, Cyrus."

Cyrus, unabashed, met Uncle Hector's reproving gaze. He even smiled, as any honest man might smile, to show his spirit was above defeat.

"I found it just now, right here on this counter."

Uncle Hector's face was still serious. "Are you sure it's your dollar?"

"Yes, sir. Findin's is keepin's."

Uncle Hector stroked his chin and twisted his mouth, as if wondering how to answer. "Well—er—if you should take one of those oranges and refuse to pay for it, and just walk away with it and say 'findin's is keepin's'—would that be all right?"

"No, sir, because I know they are for sale. This dollar wasn't."

Again Uncle Hector stroked his chain and twisted his mouth. And Cyrus smiled up at him, the smile of triumph. It was obvious, even to Ruth, that this

opening skirmish was a victory for Cyrus. She also smiled up at Uncle Hector and nodded, signifying that her escort was an able person.

But Uncle Hector was not vanquished. He laid the dollar on the counter, off near Cyrus' face, to make it clear there was no forcible retention of doubtful property—that justice should be rendered to the smallest boy as fairly as to the biggest man. Then he straightened up, pushed back his coat and inserted his thumbs in the arm holes of his vest. And there was something in his smile and in his confident manner that caused uneasiness in Ruth.

"If I should go to your house, Cyrus, and carry off a handsome sled with the name Hiawatha on it in blue letters, refuse to give it back, and say 'findin's is keepin's'—would that be all right?"

"No, sir, because you know it's my sled, and there's no other like it."

Again was Uncle Hector taken by surprise, and in his face the two children saw signs of the hesitation which often leads to defeat. Ruth's faith in Cyrus rose yet higher. As she smiled at the tall figure behind the counter her expression said as plainly as words, "Nobody can get ahead of Cyrus."

But Uncle Hector, while not prepared for such an answer to his question, even now was unconquered. "Cyrus," he said, "you'll make a great lawyer some day. You are mighty good at an argument. But suppose a stranger took that sled, and when you ran after him and told it was yours, he should say 'findin's

is keepin's' and refuse to give it up. Would that be all right?"

"Oh, no!"

"Why not?"

"Because I had told him it was mine."

"Well, now, Mrs. Bennett bought seventy cents worth of tea and sewing silk just before you and Ruth came in. She laid a dollar bill on the counter and I gave her the change—thirty cents. Then we went away for a minute to the back of the store and left it lying here. When I came back I found you claimed it, saying 'findin's is keepin's.' So, if you keep it, I lose seventy cents' worth of tea and sewing silk and thirty cents in cash."

Cyrus frowned, and looked sidewise at the bill. Ruth also frowned. As she looked up at the jar that held the striped candy tears came to her eyes. Uncle Hector smiled pleasantly upon the two troubled faces and inquired in his gentlest manner:

"Now, Cyrus, just as man to man, whose bill do you think it is?"

Cyrus worked his lips, and looked away. He stood firm on his legs, but inwardly he staggered beneath the blow. It was a whole dollar, and gone—gone forever, before he could spend it! He might never have another. Full grown men have been known to collapse under sudden loss of fortune. He dared not look at Ruth. It might unnerve him for the sacrifice. With tightened lips and blinking eyes he reached up over the counter and silently pushed the

bill away, as far toward the new owner as his short arm could do it.

"Thank you, Cyrus," said Uncle Hector. "I knew I was dealing with a man who would do the right thing when he saw it. And now, let's have some candy together and celebrate the occasion. What'll you have, Ruth?" He moved his hand, at a guess, toward the glass jar that held the pink candy with the white stripes.

She nodded. "Yes, I like that best."

He placed a stick of it in the lady's hand.

"And you, Cyrus? The same, I suppose?"

"No, sir. I'll have a cocoanut cake."

Uncle Hector replaced the jar; then, as he laid the cocoanut cake in the extended hand:

"But you wanted the candy a minute ago; a whole dollar's worth."

"That's when I was treatin' Ruth. I thought it would please her to think I liked what she liked."

"But you don't care for that candy?"

"No, sir."

Uncle Hector's face took on a new expression. He straightened up, lowered his chin, regarded the small boy in front of him with a peculiar look, bent forward and held an open palm quite close to the wondering face.

"Shake hands."

Cyrus reached up and placed his small hand in the extended palm.

The large hand closed over the little one.

"Cyrus, you are a gentleman."



IV

MATRIMONIAL

A JUNE morning.

The sky, this morning, is the bluest blue; the air delicious. There is fragrance in it, of buds, new grass and flowers. Also, in the air, is the joy of living, and the promise of even better things to come.

But Ruth Heywood, sitting upon the front door step of her father's house, seemed oblivious to the surrounding rapture. Her thoughts were solemn. Half an hour ago she had witnessed a marriage in her own parlor. Her father, a clergyman, had united two lovers in the bonds of matrimony. The ceremony had deeply impressed the youthful witness, curled up in the big arm chair near the window. And after the departure of the happy couple she had been still further, and yet more deeply impressed, by her father's

explanation of what the ceremony meant. Now, sitting in the sunshine on the front steps, her youthful mind was struggling with the marriage problem. It certainly seemed a grand idea, this bringing together of a man and woman to love each other dearly all the rest of their lives, with no drawback, and to make each other supremely happy, not only in this life but in the life to come. The more she thought and the deeper she went into this inviting subject the better she liked it. And she wondered why anybody should delay an hour before entering the holy state.

From this maiden dream of everlasting bliss she was gently awakened by peculiar sounds. These sounds came from the lips of a jubilant boy, dancing along the center of the street. If explanation were necessary the sounds might be interpreted as a song of praise to the Creator for producing such a perfect day in such a wondrous world. To further emphasize the joy of living the boy's arms were swinging above his head and his eyes were heavenward. He wore a blue and white checkered shirt-waist, brown knickers, stockings of the same color and copper-toed shoes. His hat, being a nuisance, had been left at home.

With him was a dog. And the dog, even more than his master, seemed intoxicated with present conditions. The fact of being alive had stirred him to a wild activity. At dazzling speed he was describing circles about the size of a circus ring around the singing boy. He traveled like a thing possessed and with a velocity somewhat faster than a shooting star. And

the eyes of Ruth Heywood, although young and active, blinked as they tried to follow him.

She called.

"Drowsy!"

Cyrus stopped, turned about and made a sweeping bow. When he straightened up the maiden beckoned, and said, "Come here."

As he seated himself beside her, she asked:

"Were you ever married, Cyrus?"

For an instant the boy was taken aback. As he turned and looked into the maiden's eyes, ready to carry on the joke, he saw those eyes were more than serious: they were almost tragic in their earnestness.

"Why, of course not! I'm too young."

"No, nobody is too young. It's a lovely, beautiful thing and everybody ought to do it."

Cyrus was clearly surprised; but, always polite to ladies, he nodded his appreciation of the new truth. "I didn't know. I thought only grown folks got married."

"No; it is everybody's duty. And it's my duty and yours, too."

Cyrus' eyebrows went up. "Me? Mine?"

"Yes. It's a beautiful thing and makes us all better. Father says so."

"Did he say children, too?"

Ruth hesitated. "He—he—said it makes everybody better—more unselfish—and of course he meant nobody is too young to be made better."

Cyrus nodded. "I 'spose that's so."

"And I want to marry you," said Ruth.

Cyrus nodded. "I'm ready, if it's a good thing."

"It's a lovely thing."

"What's the kind of good that it does?"

"It makes us better."

"Yes, but—but in what ways is a feller better?"

"Oh, in every way."

"Can he play ball any better?"

"I guess so."

"Is a married feller stronger and can he run faster than the feller that isn't married?"

"Oh, yes."

"Well, that's a good deal. Does it take long to have it done?"

"Just a few minutes."

As a new suspicion entered the mind of the prospective groom he edged away a few inches. "Does it hurt?"

"What hurt?"

"Getting married. Does a dentist do it—or something like that?"

Contemptuously the maiden answered. "'Course not! You are a very ignorant boy. We just stand up before father and say 'I will,' and 'Yes' and 'It is' or 'I do' and short things like that. Father does all the rest."

Then Ruth explained the ceremony, and described minutely the scene she had witnessed an hour ago in her own home.

"That's easy enough," said Cyrus. "Anybody can say those things."

"Everybody does it," said Ruth.

Cyrus smiled; it seemed a smile of relief. "That's funny. I'd always thought being married was kind of important, and kind of—kind of—lasted a mighty long time."

"It does. It lasts forever. That is why it is so beautiful and lovely. Everybody is better forever and ever."

Cyrus frowned. "I don't know."

"Don't know what?"

"I don't like the—the long time. S'pose we got enough of it. We'd have to keep on just the same."

"Oh, Cyrus! Would you get tired of me?"

"No, 'course not! Nobody could ever do that! But s'pose I died in a few days, would you have to be married all the rest of your life to a dead boy?"

"Yes, and I would be very faithful to your memory. I would never marry anybody else and I would put lovely flowers on your grave every day."

"Ho! I don't believe that!"

"Yes I would!"

Cyrus put both hands on his knees, stiffened his arms, straightened up and drew a long breath of the morning air. "Anyway, I'd rather be alive."

"Of course you would! So would almost anybody for a time. But you are very silly and ignorant if you think being married is going to kill you."

"'Course I don't!"

"Then you mustn't say such things."

"I guess I only just meant that if I was married I'd rather be alive than dead. But what do we have to do after we are married?"

"Oh, everything—just what other folks do, of course."

"And what's that?"

"Why—sit opposite each other at breakfast, go around together, and own things together, and have the same pew at church. You at one end and me at the other, with our children between us."

Cyrus frowned. "Our children?"

Ruth nodded.

"But I never heard of a boy eight years old having real children."

Ruth closed her eyes in solemn meditation. Cyrus, after waiting in vain for an answer said, with a laugh: "Think of me with real children, p'r'aps biggern I am! They could lick me in a fight." And he laughed. "That is funny, isn't it?" And he gave her arm a shake, as if to wake her up.

At the sound of laughter Zac, sitting on the step below, cocked his ears, wagged his tail and sidled up closer to Cyrus, who reached forward, gathered up the loose skin at the back of Zac's neck and gave him a friendly shake.

"Anyway," said Ruth, "everybody ought to get married. Your father and mother and my father and mother were all married.

"Yes, I s'pose they were."

"Of course they were. They would be ashamed not to. All good and wise people marry. Why, King Solomon, who was wiser than anybody, had seven hundred wives."

"How many?"

"Seven hundred."

"Seven hundred! Oh, get out!"

"But he did!"

"Seven hundred, all alive at once?"

"Yes."

"Jimminy! That seems an awful lot for one man, doesn't it?"

Ruth confessed that it did.

"Nobody in Longfields has more than one, have they?"

Ruth mentioned several citizens, but could recall none who had more than one wife.

"If one," said Cyrus, "is enough for men around here, why should your Solomon need seven hundred?"

"I don't know. Perhaps the Bible tells."

"P'r'aps," said Cyrus, "he was homely or mean or something like that, and instead of one good one he had to take seven hundred bad ones."

"No, I don't believe it was that."

Cyrus reflected a moment. "P'r'aps they were all mighty good and there being so many of 'em was what made Solomon so wise."

"I shouldn't wonder."

There came a silence. Then Cyrus straightened up and spoke with emphasis. "I just don't believe he or

anybody else had seven hundred wives. It's too many. It isn't likely, somehow. No feller would want that much."

"Why, Cyrus Alton! Don't you believe what the Bible says?"

"Yes—I—I—'course I believe it if you and the Bible both say so, but seven hundred does seem a mighty big lot." Then, as he looked away, over the common, his eyes rested on two persons who stood talking together across the way, and he asked:

"Were Solomon's wives real live women like Mrs. Strong and Mrs. Clapp, over there?"

"Of course they were!"

Cyrus closed his eyes. But through his ears came the thin, far reaching, nasal voice of Mrs. Clapp. "Did seven hundred women like that sit around the breakfast table with Solomon every morning?"

"I s'pose they did."

For an instant Cyrus faltered. He lowered his eyes and studied his shoes with the copper toes. There might be a darker side to matrimony, a noisier, less peaceful side, than Ruth had pictured. But, as he turned and looked at his companion, it came upon him, like a ray of sunshine that a hundred Ruths would be, oh, so very different from a hundred Mrs. Clapps!

"Did all those wives," he asked, "sit with Solomon in one pew on Sunday?"

Ruth made no answer.

"Doesn't the Bible say anything about that?"

"I don't remember."

"Well, if they did, I say he must have had a mighty long pew. Do you s'pose they all slept in the same bed?"

"Perhaps."

Cyrus laughed. "Seven hundred wives in one bed! Cracky! I guess old Solomon slept on the floor!"

He turned and smiled into the girl's face. But he saw no mirth, only surprise and disapproval as the lovely eyes looked into his own. He was learning his first lesson in the noble art of suppressing humor in the presence of humorous things when taken seriously. And he blushed at his own frivolity. Moreover, his sympathy for the much married Solomon did not weaken his allegiance to the girl beside him. There was, to be sure, a peculiar excitement in the idea of sitting at breakfast with seven hundred Ruths entirely his own. Yet, somehow, the vision daunted him. Even the vision of a hundred Ruths, all just alike, filled him with a kind of awe—an awe of more things than he could ever live up to. Seeking courage and consolation, he looked down into the face of Zac as a companion more like himself—on a lower spiritual plane. Zac, still sitting in front of them, always looking earnestly into the face of whoever was speaking, appeared interested in the conversation. Cyrus stroked his head, then stood up.

"Let's go ahead with this marrying, if you say so. But where's the fun of it?"

"Oh, in doing such a beautiful thing—and being better."

"There's no great fun in being better. We are good enough already."

"Oh, Cyrus! Nobody is good enough already except our fathers and mothers and ministers."

Ruth's manner was solemn. The responsibility of the enterprise seemed to rest entirely on her own shoulders. While she was deciding, with far away look, on the next step, Cyrus said:

"There's a big circus picture on Mr. Wade's barn, just stuck up this morning. It has a great big tiger crawling up an elephant, and soldiers fighting Indians, all big, in splendid colors! Come over and see it."

Ruth frowned. In her very pretty eyes, as she turned them in sadness on the prospective groom, was pity—the almost tearful yet contemptuous pity with which Wisdom looks on Folly.

"Cyrus, you are just a boy. You don't understand things."

"Don't understand what things?"

"How important this marriage is."

"Oh, that's all right. I'm ready. Let's go ahead now and have it over with. What do we do first?"

"We must go in to father and ask him to marry us, just as he did those people this morning."

"All right. Come along."

As the two children entered the house, Zac with a bark of joy bounced into the hall ahead of them. It was a loud bark, a piercing, youthful bark, that might disturb a dozen clergymen if working on their sermons.

Ruth stopped. "Hush, you horrid dog!"

"Zac, shut up!" said Cyrus. "Go back, and stay on the porch."

But Zac preferred to accompany the expedition. Without openly refusing to obey, he merely bounced about, just out of reach, wagged his tail and smiled in the faces of the bride and groom.

"Shall we let him come?" said Cyrus.

Ruth hesitated, but only for an instant. "No. A dog barking at a wedding would be unreligious."

So Cyrus, by pleadings, threats and gentle force induced his more worldly comrade to remain without. But he said good-by to him as he turned away. For, in parting with this bachelor friend, he may have had feelings in common with other matrimonial heroes when marching to the altar.

Meanwhile, the Rev. George Bentley Heywood, father of the prospective bride, stood at the west window of his study. His thoughts were far away. In his hand was a letter from a friend in China. This friend, a missionary, had presented, in eloquent and convincing words, the various joys, spiritual, material and social that attended the servant of God when converting the heathen of the Orient.

Mr. Heywood's imagination had responded to the winged words and was already disporting itself in the Chinese vineyard. There had been other letters, all with the same message. And, now, standing at the window with the letter in his hand, he was thinking, and thinking hard, over the most important decision of his life,

Mr. Heywood was a serious man. Upon his person lay no superfluous flesh. His face, otherwise severe, was tempered by the eyes of a poet—eyes of a gentle, somewhat solemn beauty. They were pleasant to look into. Ruth had inherited these eyes, and in her childish face they shone with an added beauty. They were dreamy eyes, a soft brown-black with blacker lashes, and either tragic or mirthful, as occasion called.

When the study door opened—with no preliminary knock—there was annoyance in the clergyman's manner as his eyes turned toward the intruder. This time there were two intruders,—Cyrus and his fiancée. Mr. Heywood frowned when the two small people advanced to the center of the room. He was in no mood for answering children's questions. But, as he frowned, Cyrus bowed—one of his best and most elaborate efforts, bringing the heel of one foot against the instep of the other, all with a gracious, sweeping salutation of his free hand—the one that was not leading Ruth. It was the greeting of one gentleman of the old school to another, of deference and good wishes. Mr. Heywood, partly, perhaps, from his thoughts being in China, found himself also bowing deferentially, as if to some exalted and venerable person. Suddenly realizing the absurdity of such an obeisance he straightened up and frowned again. Then he spoke more harshly than if he had not blundered into such a foolish action.

“Well, children, what is it?”

Cyrus spoke, “We have come to get married.”

"Who?"

"We. We—us."

"What do you mean?"

"Ruth and I want to get married."

Mr. Heywood frowned again and blinked, as if to summon his wandering wits, undecided whether to believe or doubt his eyes and ears. His thoughts, barely returned from China, seemed unequal to a sudden grasp of the situation.

"What are you saying?"

"I am saying that Ruth and I want to get married."

"Whose idea is this?"

"Mine," said Ruth.

As the father met the earnest eyes of his daughter he almost smiled.

"Where did you get such an idea, Ruth?"

"From seeing the people you married this morning. You said marriage was a beautiful thing."

"So it is. So it is. But that was very different. Only grown people marry, so run away, children. I have no time for play this morning." And he turned away and sat down at his desk.

"But, Mr. Heywood," said Cyrus, "this is not play. This is important."

"Important? Why important, Cyrus?"

"'Cause Ruth wants it."

This time Mr. Heywood smiled. "That's a good sentiment, Cyrus. It shows a kind regard for the

lady. But run away, both of you. I am very busy this morning."

"But, Mr. Heywood," said Cyrus, "what's Ruth done that she should be punished and not have what she wants, and wants ever so much?"

"How punished?"

"By not getting what she wants."

"And what do you say she wants?"

"Me."

The father laughed. "Oh, it's you she wants, is it?"

"Yes, sir."

Mr. Heywood drew a hand slowly across his mouth as he looked inquiringly at Ruth.

Ruth smiled and nodded. "Yes, sir."

Her father also nodded as in polite recognition of her wishes. Turning to Cyrus, he inquired, "What are you going to live on? What is going to be your business?"

"I'm going to be a discoverer, like Columbus."

"I am afraid there won't be much left to discover by the time you are a man—not on this earth, at least. The big continents are already discovered."

"But there will be new countries at the bottom of the sea, and under the earth and on the moon, and such places."

"On *such* places! Dear me, Cyrus, do you think of taking your wife to the moon?"

"Yes, sir."

"But how will you be supporting Ruth all that time? A husband should be earning money."

"Oh, that part'll be all right! I'm going to be a train robber."

"A train robber!"

"Yes, sir."

Mr. Heywood whistled softly and looked at his daughter. "Well—now—is that a nice business, Ruth, for a model husband? Do you want to marry a train robber?"

Ruth smiled and nodded. "Yes, I shall always like Cyrus and whatever he does."

"But suppose Cyrus is imprisoned for life, or hanged, as often happens to train robbers?"

Cyrus interrupted, and spoke contemptuously. "No, I shan't be that kind! It's only the stupid ones that's caught!"

Mr. Heywood closed his eyes for a moment and appeared to be thinking it over. "Of course, it's possible,—just possible, that you may change your mind as you get older."

"No, sir. 'Cause a man gets lots of money that way and gets it quick and easy. And there'll be jewelry, too. I shall give the jewelry to Ruth."

"And I," said Ruth, "shall give lots of it to mother. Mother likes jewelry."

"Yes," said Mr. Heywood, "most women do. But isn't stolen jewelry a little——"

Again Cyrus interrupted. "But that won't be stolen jewelry. When you steal anything you get it when the other feller isn't looking—kind of sneakin'. I shall take it right before their faces."

"Yes, but you threaten to kill them if they resist. That's robbery, isn't it?"

"Yes, sir, but robbery isn't like stealing. It's more—more—it's braver."

"Braver? Possibly. And you really consider robbery an honorable business?"

"Oh, yes."

"And I can help him," said Ruth; "we would work together."

Mr. Heywood looked from the cherubic lips of the groom into the clear eyes of his superlatively conscientious little daughter and murmured: "Yes, you would be of great assistance." Then, after a pause:

"Now, Cyrus, you and Ruth come to me twenty years hence and if we are all alive and Ruth still wants you I have no doubt we can arrange a wedding."

"Twenty years!" exclaimed Ruth. "Why, father, we shall all be dead!"

"Oh, no! I trust not."

"Or too old—too awful old!"

"No, indeed! You will be twenty-seven. Call it fourteen years, then you will be only twenty-one."

"But," said Cyrus, "we may forget all about it in fourteen years."

"Then it will be no disappointment to you if you can't marry. But run along now, children, I have no more time for you." He spoke with such decision as he began reading the letter in his hand that the unmarried couple turned about and slowly vanished.

When they passed out into the open air, a stranger

might have thought, from the manner in which Zac bounced with joy and lifted up his voice, that Cyrus was emerging from the Valley of the Shadow of Death. As they stood again on the porch, the corners of Ruth's mouth were drooping. There were tears in her irresistible eyes. Cyrus laid his hands on her shoulders.

"Now don't you feel bad, Ruthy. If you want to be married, we just will."

The maiden shook her head. "He said not."

"No, he didn't. He only said he was busy."

"He said only grown people got married."

"But he didn't say children couldn't if they wanted to."

In the maiden's face came a brighter look. "Yes, that is true, isn't it?"

"'Course it is! And we will be doing something new and different. It makes folks famous to be the first to do things. Look at Christopher Columbus, and look at Benjamin Franklin, the first man to fly a kite and steer lightnin' and make it mind him."

"Was he married when he was a child?"

"Nobody knows. But if you and I are the first children to get married—the very first, why our pictures might be in history books."

Ruth laughed. "That would be funny, wouldn't it?"

"Yes, wouldn't it! And under it would be printed Mr. and Mrs. Ruth Heywood."

"Oh, no! It would be Mr. and Mrs. Cyrus Alton. It's always that way."

"Then we'll be the first ones to do it the new way. We needn't do just like everybody else. But who's going to wait fourteen years. Not us! If your father is too busy to do it, we'll get somebody else."

"Who?"

"I dunno." And he looked away toward the common and became thoughtful.

Now Cyrus' ideas of matrimony were vague, and impersonal. As a game it had never interested him. He had given it no attention. On some other subject he had definite views—such as war, baseball, voyages of discovery, balloons, maple sugar, battleships and the different kinds of ice cream. But this marriage business, now that Ruth wanted it, had suddenly become important. And when Ruth really wanted a thing he felt that reason, religion and the Laws of Man and Nature should stand aside. Moreover, Cyrus was no quitter. He was not of those who are easily discouraged. Persistence, the sort that stiffens in disaster, was one of his dominant traits. A precious gift on occasions; but there were times, in the bosom of his own family, when it was not admired. As guides to character the drowsy eyes and cherubic mouth were, in this particular, misleading. Behind them lay the tenacity of purpose which so often transforms defeat into victory. In this present emergency there seemed to him especial demand for achievement. Ruth wanted something and when Ruth wanted something it was not for him, nor for others, to reason why.

So now, while the bride, crushed to earth, was

mourning the downfall of a high endeavor, her companion had not accepted defeat. With roving eyes and tight shut mouth he was seeking some other road to victory.

Inspiration came.

Seeing no road to victory, up or down the village street, his eyes turned heavenward. As they rested on the spire of the Unitarian church, just across the way, there came an answer to his appeal. It came through the open windows of the church—the notes of an organ. He turned and seized his fiancée by an arm. “Ruth! Listen!”

“To what?”

“To that music! It’s Horace Phillips practising on the organ!”

Ruth nodded in acknowledgment of the fact, but she saw no relation between the music and their late rebuff.

“We can go right over there and get married,” said Cyrus. “It doesn’t matter who does it so long as it is in a church and there’s music.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yes, of course! Ask anybody.”

There was nobody to ask, so he took her by the hand and started forward. She held back. He pulled harder. “Come along. There’s the church all open; and the organ playing. It’s just the place to be married.”

She yielded. “But there’s no minister to do it.”

“That don’t make any difference. As long as we

are married in a church with music, anybody can do it."

He spoke with authority—the kind that carries conviction and puts an end to controversy.

As they started, however, she again held back, and exclaimed, in a final despair, "Oh, I forgot!"

"Forgot what?"

"The ring. We have to have a ring."

"What's the use of a ring?"

"Nobody is married without a ring. The man puts a ring on the woman's finger and says things."

"Well—I can say the things and we'll just play there's a ring."

"No."

"Oh, come along!"

"No."

Now Cyrus had become interested in this business. He felt a pride in carrying it through. To fail now would be disgrace. In vexation he raised his right hand—the one not holding Ruth's—and thrust its thumb between his teeth. On that hand something glistened.

"Why, there's a ring!" exclaimed Ruth, "right on your finger! Isn't it lucky?"

Cyrus regarded the little silver band.

Ruth repeated: "Isn't it lucky!"

Cyrus hesitated. "Do I have to give it to you?"

"Yes."

"For you to keep and not give back?"

"Yes, of course!"

"But Henry Wheelock made it for me out of a ten-cent piece. I've only had it a little while."

"Oh, Cyrus! Would you be so mean as that?"

"I'm not mean! You know I'm not mean! Henry Wheelock made it out of my own ten-cent piece and I—I—don't want to lose it."

A look of sorrow in Ruth's eyes suddenly changed to contempt. "Then keep your old ring! I'm sure *I* don't want it." And she pulled away the hand that was in his, wheeled about and started to reënter the house. But Cyrus caught her by the arm.

"Oh, that's all right, Ruthy! You shall have it. Come. Don't let's fight."

So began this lovers' quarrel. But as often happens, the male of the species besought and appealed, apologized, promised everything, acknowledged guilt and sufficiently humbled himself until Sweet Peace returned. Then all was forgiven, and a second time they started for the church. Zac brought up the rear.

On the church steps sat Luther Dean and the New Boy. The New Boy had lived in Longfields only a few weeks. He differed, in many ways, from the other boys of the village. He was blasé, and older in his feelings; he came from a larger town and had seen more of the world. His tendency, now,—natural, perhaps, but unrepresed—was to despise more simple people. He gave the impression among still younger boys of having crowded into his ten years of life a red career of war and piracy, of wild adventure, of reckless deeds and thrilling escapes. These experiences were rather

suggested than described, always in a casual off-hand way, calmly and without excitement, in a voice and manner tempered by the wisdom of the ages. And his eyes, light blue and frigidly serene, moved slowly from one listener to another in a weary but patient condescension. His usual haunts, it appeared, were the upper ether, and the deep sea, the cañon and the prairie, the impenetrable forest, the decks of battle-ships and fields of carnage.

As the bridal couple approached the steps, Cyrus called to Luther Dean and beckoned to him. Luther came forward. So also did the New Boy—the Budding Outlaw—although he was not invited; and his presence embarrassed Cyrus, for this was a private business, in a sense, and not for the general public. Besides, Cyrus did not like the New Boy. However, he braced up and put on a careless front.

“We want you to marry us, Luther, now, here in the church.”

Luther frowned, then smiled. “Me? Marry?”

“Yes, marry us—Ruth and me.”

“Golly! I—I—never married anybody.”

“That don’t matter. Anybody can do it.”

“But I’m too young. It takes a man.”

“No, it doesn’t. Ruth can tell you what to say. It’s all easy. Come along.”

They entered the church; but Zac, like many of his kind, was unpleasantly affected by music, so he remained outside.

Up the main aisle they started, Luther in front, the

bride and groom behind, holding hands. In the gallery above Horace Phillips was practising various tunes, and the voice of the great organ filled the church. To the bride and groom, both lovers of music, the notes of the organ seemed more impressive than ever in the now empty building.

But the wedding procession had barely started up the aisle when the ceremonies were rudely interrupted. The Budding Outlaw, smarting perhaps at being ignored, followed close behind and yielded to a vengeful impulse. Ruth's hair, gathered by a ribbon behind her head, was flowing down her back like a golden mane. The Budding Outlaw reached forth and seized a handful, then gave it a violent jerk, as if driving a horse, and he said,

"Hi there! Giddap; giddap!"

Ruth cried aloud in pain, "Stop it! Oh, stop it! It hurts!"

She could not turn her head, but raised her hands in vain efforts at protection.

Cyrus wheeled about. "Let go that hair!"

And he scowled in anger at the aggressor. But the aggressor merely renewed the twitchings with: "Giddap hossey. Giddap."

"Let go that hair," once more said Cyrus.

The Budding Outlaw, for answer, twitched the golden hair again, and harder than before. As Ruth in helpless agony was still raising her hands to her head, Cyrus aimed a blow at the Budding Outlaw and hit him in the face. But the Budding Outlaw was one

year older and one year bigger than Cyrus, and twenty years cooler, more cynical and more blasé. So, without even loosening his hold on the bride's hair, he struck out with his free hand and landed full on Cyrus's mouth. The blow was so well directed that the recipient staggered back and stood for a second or two as if dazed. On the Budding Outlaw's face was a smile of easy victory—and contempt. Cyrus saw it. In Ruth's face he saw torture and helpless anger. Then he threw himself again at the enemy. And again the enemy without loosening his left-hand clutch on the golden hair, sent his fist against the approaching face, landing full on its nose and followed it by a sudden push. Cyrus staggered back across the aisle and leaned against the nearest pew. He blinked, and drew a hand across his bleeding mouth. His nose seemed—to him—about twice its usual size and rapidly growing bigger. Then Ruth, forgetting her own pain, cried out:

“Oh, Luther, Luther! Help Cyrus!”

But, either from wisdom or some other reason, Luther refrained from interfering. He looked at Ruth, then down at the floor, then up again at the Budding Outlaw, now terrible in his easy triumph. Ruth called again to him, yet more urgent—a passionate appeal for help. It was the cry of one old playmate to another, for the rescue of a bosom friend. But the organ above was pouring forth its music and Luther turned away, pretending not to hear the cry.

Cyrus, during this moment's lull, did some rapid

thinking. He saw the folly of his previous attacks. So, as Ruth was uttering her second appeal to his lukewarm friend, he advanced again, but more slowly than before, ducked his head and dodged a blow, then jumped, and closed with the enemy. And to the Budding Outlaw it seemed as if a dozen boys were on him. Blows rained upon his face. Copper toed shoes were hammering, with the rage of demons, against his sensitive shins. He let go the maiden's hair, as all his hands were none too many for this peaceable boy now suddenly transformed into a reckless and bloodthirsty athlete. He could not reach Cyrus's face, as that face, for protection, was pressed close against the Outlaw's own chest. And when, at last, he got both hands against Cyrus's face and body to push him off he felt ten fingers tighten about his throat with a grip that scared him. For now, as the two iron thumbs were pressing his windpipe with murderous power, he realized that this boy was fighting with the fury and the strength of those who fight for victory or for death. He gurgled, gasped, pulled Cyrus's hair and beat wildly at his head. But when a man is fighting for the woman of his choice—or for any other holy cause—he has the strength of many. So with Cyrus. The tearing of his hair, the blows upon his head and face and body were as summer zephyrs. For him, at the moment, death could have no terrors. He was in this struggle for victory or annihilation.

No boy can live without breathing, and the Budding Outlaw's strength was going. Cyrus forced him to

the floor. Then, knowing nothing of the Rules of the Ring, he hammered him in the face and jammed his knees into his stomach, as if to kill.

At last, after a final blow and jab and kick, he climbed to his feet, stepped back and looked down at him. Ruth seized him by an arm and tried to drag him from the church.

"Come! Come quick, before he gets up!"

But a change had come over the once peaceful groom. The lust of battle was in him. He paid no attention to her words. Breathing hard, with bruises on his face, his lips bleeding, he beckoned to the figure on the floor as if angry at delay:

"Come along. Get up."

But the Dare-devil of the West, the killer of Indians, the Pirates' Terror, had no intention of rising. Enough was sufficient for this Despiser of Peace, this Tormentor of Brides. To fight in orderly fashion with a boy you know you can lick—that's one thing. But to struggle with wild animals, cyclones and supernatural forces that ignore the rules of war and really mean to kill you, and will,—unless you can get away,—that's very different. Moreover, something was telling him now that a big will in a little body can demolish giants. He knew he was stronger than Cyrus, but the thing with which he had so suddenly become acquainted was the spirit within this smaller boy—the same old spirit that stirred the Greeks at Marathon, and the handful of Lexington farmers. And now, before him, with the swelling nose and bleeding lips, glowered the em-

bodiment of that immortal spirit. The Tormentor of Brides suspected, and his suspicions were correct, that if he hurled this boy a dozen times against the opposite pews he would still come at him, and each assault would be more deadly than its predecessor.

Cyrus, again ignoring the Rules of the Ring, stepped forward and kicked him. "Come, get up! Get up. Finish it!"

Slowly the New Boy shook his head, with a gesture of defeat. He muttered something too low to hear—words drowned in the notes of the organ. He refused to rise.

Then Cyrus turned and held out his hand to Ruth. In drawing the back of a fist across his mouth during the conflict his cheeks had become smeared with blood. As Ruth stared in a kind of terror at this gory visage with riotous hair, swelling nose and still bleeding lips, she saw in the erstwhile drowsy eyes a look that was unfamiliar; a look of determination, as if no arguments from God or man or devil would be considered. Weak and all atremble, her one desire was for hurrying home. But she obeyed the unspoken mandate and laid her hand in his. Then Luther, also in obedience to an unspoken command, this time a peremptory gesture toward the pulpit, again started up the aisle. And it so happened as the little assemblage resumed its interrupted progress the great organ in the gallery burst forth with Wagner's "Wedding March"; and it filled the church.

The marriage ceremony passed off well;—that is,

of course,—making allowance for the officiating person who had no knowledge of what he ought to say, or of what he was saying. With constant promptings and corrections from the bride—who although somewhat hysterical at the moment, had a remarkable memory for the sound of words—Luther managed to get along. To misunderstand certain promptings was excusable, for the music was confusing. Horace Phillips, in the gallery, ignorant of what was happening below, had started off with the full force of the organ, and he continued with enthusiasm until the swelling notes resounded through the empty building.

Ruth supplied all the language.

Luther. Will you take this wedded girl for your wife?

Cyrus. I will.

Luther. Will you take this wedded boy for your husband?

Ruth. I will.

Luther. Do you promise to endure with all your worldly goods?

Cyrus. I do.

Luther. Will you hold on for better than worse?

Ruth. I will.

Luther. You promise to obey?

Cyrus. I do.

Luther. Until death departs, richer or poorer and cherish.

Ruth. I do.

Cyrus. It is.

Luther. I denounce you as man and wife.

Cyrus. I do.

Ruth. No, Cyrus, you say nothing.

Cyrus. Nothing.

Ruth. No, no! You don't say anything—just keep still.

Luther. With this ring I you wed.

Cyrus. No. I say that!

He said it, and with heroic self-control bade a silent farewell to his silver treasure as he slipped it on a finger of the bride. Then, to the rejoicing music, they marched down the aisle.

Outside the church the bride, who feared a renewal of the conflict, looked about with anxious eyes for the Budding Outlaw. But she had no cause for alarm. The Budding Outlaw was visible, far down the street, beyond the common, marching with humble mien, reflecting sadly on the uncertainties of human life.



V

HE MEETS TWO LADIES

MISS Anita Clement was the maiden lady who had rented, with her two unmarried sisters, Mr. David Lothrop's house at the west end of the village. She had a girlish figure, good features and soulful eyes. Her exact age was somewhere between twenty-five and forty. This lady's delicate beauty was impaired a trifle by a nervous mouth which told, in spite of all efforts to the contrary, that its owner was easily annoyed, and was a stranger to the various blessings of a tranquil spirit. She had no sense of humor; but this deficiency was counterbalanced by a profound respect for the conventions of life, and by a sincere and humble adoration of her own religious creed, with a corresponding contempt for all others. Her dominant attribute was timidity. Compared with Miss Clement, the average mouse was a

fearless desperado. As is usually the case with such temperaments, her nerves were assertive.

This particular November afternoon they seemed to have started a revolt throughout her whole interior mechanism; and she decided to consult a physician. So she walked out to Dr. Alton's house. On this walk—about two miles—she passed a group of boys playing with a football. Now boys, to Miss Clement, were the living emblems of noise and danger. Her one dread concerning a future existence was the possibility of there being boys in Heaven. And, in this life, the things she dreaded most were fire, burglars, run-away horses, smallpox and boys. Her sympathy with boys was akin to her sympathy with thunderstorms and pirates. In passing boys in the street or on the common she held her breath in nervous terror, expecting to be struck by a baseball, or bat or stone, green apple or snow-ball, according to season. Only in color and in clothing did she recognize any difference between boys and Comanche Indians. She loved Law and Order; whereas, to a boy, Law and Order were merely bars to freedom. She had reasons for believing that the highest ambition of every normal boy under twelve years of age was to become an influential outlaw. And she was not far wrong.

This being Saturday afternoon, and no school, the earth seemed swarming with these offensive creatures. However, by going around the common instead of across it, she reached Dr. Alton's house alive—and rang the bell. The door was opened by yet another

boy, eight or nine years of age. Miss Clement, being a newcomer in the town, had not the honor of this child's acquaintance. Knowing all boys to be barbarians, with no manners, she was surprised when this one acknowledged her presence with a smile of welcome and a ceremonious bow. It was the kind of salutation that Louis XIV would have given to the Queen of Spain. She might have expected it from an elderly dancing master, but never from a boy in this New England village. Taken by surprise, she was silent a moment, fearing this youthful savage, perhaps more uncivilized even than other boys, was amusing himself at her expense. A good look at his face, however, allayed suspicion. In his calm eyes and radiant smile there was nothing but pleasure at seeing her. Beside him stood—or rather bounced—a youthful dog. He was a fox terrier. Judging from the activity of his tail and from the general expression of his person, the arrival of the visitor was affording him joy and excitement. In a tentative bark he told his welcome.

But Miss Clement hesitated. Her dread of boys was only equaled by her aversion to dogs. How a civilized person could live in the same house with a dog she had never been able to understand. Their manners and customs were unspeakable. And the exuberent vitality of this dog annoyed her. His joy was unreasoning and intemperate. He wagged his tail with such energy as to sway his entire person. Judging from outward vibrations his very soul was wagging. He gave the impression—to this visitor—of having a

frivolous nature. And she found solace in the thought that, later on, he would be made to realize that life was a serious thing.

"Is Dr. Alton at home?" she inquired.

"No, ma'am."

"Do you know when he will return?"

"Oh, very soon! Won't you walk in?" and he stepped aside, holding the door wide open. At the same time, he waved with his free hand a courtly gesture toward the interior of the house. Inwardly disturbed by this unexpected deportment of a barbarian, Miss Clement walked into the sitting-room and seated herself on a sofa, near the open fire. It was a large cheerful room with white woodwork and a pale green paper on the walls, somewhat faded in places near the sunny windows. Scattered over the large center table were many books and periodicals. On the floor in front of her was a pair of scissors and a family Bible. The Bible was open and three of its illustrations, recently extracted, were lying beside it. The author of this mutilation climbed into a large arm chair directly opposite, sitting very erect, as if on his best behavior. He was watching her with undisguised interest and approval.

But the dog was inclined to be familiar. He jammed his nose against her skirt and ankles and sniffed in a most offensive way. The boy saw that these things annoyed her and he called off the brute, rebuked him and apologized to the visitor. "I guess you have a dog, and Zac smells him."

Miss Clement, with some severity, denied the accusation. "Indeed, I have no dog." And it was clear from her manner that she had no such associates.

Now all boys were alike to Miss Clement. The only striking features in this one's face were his eyes. Their heavy lids, coming far down over the iris, gave a half shut, drowsy look to his face, and Miss Clement felt sorry that his parents should be afflicted with such a stupid child. His fat, cherubic little mouth, however, seemed to indicate a cheerful spirit. As the two sat facing each other, the young male and the adult super-civilized female, the lady from some undefined reason felt ill at ease. Yet she knew that nothing was more absurd than a woman of her age being ill at ease in the presence of a nine-year-old boy. As she looked again into his eyes she began to realize that their very drowsiness gave an impression of abnormal serenity and repose—as of concealing hidden depths of wisdom. Also they seemed to be sitting in judgment on her. The fact of his being a boy aroused antipathy. Although she knew that many good men had once been boys, as certain butterflies have once been worms. Moreover, she knew it was not really his own fault that he had come into the world in that form. They were necessary evils, like taxes and old age.

"Are you Dr. Alton's son?" she asked.

"Yes, ma'am."

"What is your name?"

"Cyrus."

While Miss Clement was wondering why New

Englishers persisted in giving such names to helpless children she was startled by his saying, regretfully:

"You don't like that name."

"Not like it? Why do you think I don't like it?"

"I know by your face."

Miss Clement blushed. The tranquil eyes were looking sadly into her own as if investigating in a friendly way her most secret thoughts. She became embarrassed.

"Why, yes—I like it."

"It is better than some other names."

"Indeed it is! Very much better!"

"It is the name of a great conqueror."

"Yes—of course—and—perhaps you may be a great conqueror yourself when you grow up."

"No. I don't care for that business. I shall sit on the high seat of a big, gold band-wagon of a circus full of splendid music, with eight white horses. I shall drive the horses and listen to the music."

"Yes, that will be very nice."

The room seemed warm after the November chill outside, and Miss Clement drew off her thick gloves. As her left hand dropped carelessly beside her, upon the edge of the sofa, she felt a sickening contact with something warm and very wet. Quickly she withdrew the hand. With an exclamation of disgust, she held aloft the befouled member. But the dog, whose generous tongue by one lingering stroke yielded such a vast amount of moisture, had risen upon his hind legs to accomplish it, and now stood looking up into her

face for recognition of the friendly act. His reward was a look of loathing. And for a moment she still held aloft the varnished hand, uncertain what to do.

The boy laughed. "Why, it's nothing but dog spit!"

He drew forth from his pocket a handkerchief. With two steps forward he offered it to the lady. As he did so he bowed with the pretentious grace of a Chesterfield advancing to the relief of Beauty. But Miss Clement recoiled. For on this handkerchief were blood stains—also mud—and green paint. Too much disgusted to think of manners, she ignored his offer and used her own handkerchief. But she shrank from replacing it in a clean pocket.

Looking down at the floor, she frowned.

"I hope it was not you who cut those pictures from that nice book."

The Vandal smiled, and nodded, giving the impression of pride in the work.

"Are you the only person in the house?" she asked.

"Yes, ma'am. Joanna's gone to the store."

Again she frowned down at the litter on the floor. "Does your mother know what you have been doing here?"

"Oh, no!"

"Has she never told you not to cut up books?"

"No, ma'am."

Miss Clement frowned again, and stiffened a little.

"And your father? Does he allow you to do such things?"

"I don't know. I didn't ask him. Are you fond of pictures?"

"Yes—I am fond of pictures."

He got down from his chair, picked up the three engravings, came and stood beside her, leaning against her knees. He laid the pictures in her lap and asked which she liked the best.

One engraving showed Joshua commanding the sun to stand still; one showed Elijah going to Heaven in his fiery chariot; and the other—she almost blushed as she looked at it—showed Susanna and the elders. Susanna wore no clothing and the elders were shocking old men.

"Which do you like best?" he repeated.

She pointed to Joshua.

"Which next?"

She pointed to Elijah.

"Now—I don't care for that feller himself," he said, "but I like the pretty lady. Best of all, though, I think, is the horses and the chariot going right up into the sky. Just think of it!" he exclaimed; "just think of going way up into the sky! I think I shall do it myself! Did he really go up that way with those fat horses?"

"No, I think not."

"Then it's a fairy story."

"No, it's a Bible story."

"What's the difference?"

"Bible stories are true stories and fairy tales are made-up stories."

"But you just said this man didn't go up to Heaven with a span of horses."

"Not in just that way—probably."

"Did he go up at all?"

Miss Clement hesitated. "Well—I suppose he did, perhaps."

"I betcher he couldn't go up in any way like that with horses treading on nothing but air."

Miss Clement had not come to this house for a theological argument. But she said nothing and merely heaved a sigh, a sigh of weariness.

But the boy was still fresh. "What was this man's name?"

"Elijah."

"Elijah what?"

"I don't think he had a last name."

"Where did he live?"

"Off in the East."

"If any one should write him a letter, asking him how he went up that way, and addressed the envelope just Elijah, off in the Yeast—would he get it?"

"Oh, no; he died long, long ago."

"Well, anyway, I am going up myself, some day, but not with horses. Horses couldn't do it. When I go I shall go with a kite, a big kite with a long string. I shall have a box kite. You know what a box kite is?"

"I think so."

"Well, it will be a big box kite longer'n this room, with me sitting inside and Luther Dean flying it. When

it gets ten miles up in the air I shall reach down with long scissors and cut the string."

As he stepped back to study the effect of this news, she found his drowsy eyes were no longer drowsy, but wider open and all aglow with enthusiasm. "That's my own idea!"

She smiled and nodded. "Yes, it is very original."

"And then I shall sail way up as high as I want to. Perhaps to the moon!"

"Yes, that will be very nice."

"What's the use of crawling about on the earth like a bug? I'd rather be a bird."

Miss Clement nodded assent and lowered her eyes to the mutilated Bible. But his enthusiasm was contagious. She almost believed, for a moment, that he could do it. However, she was uncomfortable in the presence of this barbarian. She knew, from experience, the awful frankness of a boy; the statements he can make, and his cruel questions; questions that upheave religions, that lay bare your secret doubtings and impugn the wisdom and the motives of the Creator himself. A boy's thirsty, delving little mind is never satisfied with your easy answer that "the ways of the Almighty are inscrutable." As this interview proceeded she realized—and to her chagrin—that there was something about this vandal that caused her a peculiar kind of restraint and self-consciousness—almost diffidence. Being distinctly a nervous person and gently irritated at her own self-consciousness, Miss Clement looked about the room, over the boy's head,

with an expression somewhat more severe than the situation required. But his instincts of hospitality were not so easily suppressed. Pointing to a dish of fruit on a further table, he asked:

"Won't you have an apple?"

"No, I think you."

He seemed disappointed. Then as his eyes rested on a little music box that lay on the table beside him, he exclaimed, with enthusiasm: "You like good music?"

In her own voice there was less enthusiasm as she answered, "Yes, I—think I—do."

Miss Clement suddenly realized—as happens with nervous people—that she was annoyed by these foolish questions. Instead of replying she straightened up and looked first at the clock, then at the boy. She found him gazing at her earnestly, as if trying to read her thoughts.

"This music box," he said, with signs of embarrassment, "plays five lovely tunes: The Last Rose of Summer, Hear Me, Norma, The Carnival of Ven——"

"Not now," she interrupted.

Had her host been an older man, with a knowledge of women—if such is possible—this unexpected change of manner would have been a warning.

"It's four o'clock," she added hastily, and her smiles had vanished. "Are you the only person in the house?"

Taken aback, and obviously mortified by this sudden change of manner, he took a backward step and

replaced the music box on the table. In his face, with a slight quivering of the lips, came the first signs of embarrassment he had shown. He bowed: not the gracious, self-possessed, courtly salutation of a kingly welcome with which he had first greeted her, but a solemn inclination of the head, as one who humbles himself—but gracefully—before an angry deity. And he murmured:

“I am sorry.”

Her eyebrows went up. “Sorry for what?”

“I don’t know—exactly.”

For an instant she failed to understand. Then into her face came a gentler expression. “Yes, you do! You are sorry because you think you have troubled me; but it is I who beg your pardon. I am ashamed of myself. You have given me a lesson in politeness.”

And she smiled her sweetest smile. Whereupon the sunshine returned to his own face. Encouraged by this change of atmosphere, he resumed with new courage his rôle of host. For a moment he studied her face, uncertain as to what was expected of him. Folding his hands above his head, he glanced about the room, searching for inspiration. It came. His face brightened. The slumbrous eyes sparkled. Coming a step nearer, he demanded with suppressed enthusiasm:

“Do you care for snakes or mice?”

The visitor regarded him with a kind of terror.

She frowned, turned her face to one side and shook her head. The host misunderstood the movement.

"But it's no trouble. I can get them both. They are right here in the woodshed." And he started toward the door.

"Come back," she said, "I don't care to see either of them."

"But the snake is dead and the mouse won't bite. He knows me."

Miss Clement shuddered: "No! No! Don't speak of them again! Come back."

He came back. She knew, and had always known, that boys themselves were a species of reptile. She felt, at this moment, that whatever this boy did must be regarded from that point of view—and forgiven. And as she wondered how a benevolent Creator could permit, in a decently ordered world, the existence of boys, the Vandal exclaimed in a reflective tone, but with a smile of amusement:

"Women are funny!"

At that moment the grandfather clock in the corner struck four. Miss Clement frowned in that direction. "When did Dr. Alton say he would be back?"

"He didn't say."

"But you told me he would return soon."

"Yes, ma'am."

"But you really don't know when?"

"No, ma'am."

"Then you told a fib."

The Vandal smiled and nodded. "Yes, ma'am."

"But that is wrong, you know. You should always tell the truth."

"Yes, ma'am. But I thought it would be good to have you come in, and sit."

Miss Clement almost frowned and smiled in one expression. "But you did wrong. Doesn't your mother punish you for telling such fibs?"

"No, ma'am."

"Is she not at home?"

"Oh, no!"

"When do you expect her?"

"Oh, never!"

"Never?"

The drowsy eyes, in astonishment, opened a little wider. "Of course not. She is dead."

"Oh, that is too bad! I am very sorry. Was it long ago that she died?"

"Oh, yes! Long, long ago. More than twenty years."

"More than twenty years! I think you must be mistaken. How old are you?"

"Nine next July."

"Then your mother could not have died twenty years ago."

"Yes. She died long before I was born."

Miss Clement slowly shook her head. "But not twenty years. That is impossible."

"But she did."

"Then she was your step-mother perhaps?"

"No. My own mother."

This conversation was becoming so very absurd that

Miss Clement made no answer. She merely looked away—and studied the room.

The boy smiled as if amused at her ignorance. “Don’t you understand how it was?”

“The lady’s only reply was to close her eyes wearily. But he stepped nearer and laid a hand on each of her knees, to wake her up.

“Don’t you see,” he said, “the difference between eight and twenty is twelve, isn’t it?”

“It is.”

“Well, then she must have been dead twelve years when I was born.”

Now Miss Clement could never do arithmetic. She abominated figures, and these words were uttered with so much conviction—reënforced by the wisdom of his eyes—that her brain became tangled for a moment. It seemed to shrink, in a sort of nervous bewilderment, from this fantastic puzzle. He smiled at her obvious confusion, moved backward a step or two, folded his hands behind him and squirmed with delight. “It’s funny you don’t understand. I guess I am smarter than you are.”

Miss Clement shut tight her lips and looked away—anywhere. Her own brain seemed laughing at her.

“I s’pose,” said the Vandal, “I don’t need a mother much.”

“Every boy needs a mother. Is Joanna your sister?”

He laughed at such an absurd mistake. “No! She’s

lots older than *you* are. She's housekeeper—and lots of things."

Miss Clement looked about the room, at the pictures on the walls. They were mostly engravings and photographs.

"Is there a portrait of your mother here?"

"No, ma'am."

"Not anywhere in the house?"

"No."

"There must be a photograph."

"No."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes'm."

"That is ver' strange."

"Why?"

"Because—because—it is most unusual. Did she die here in this house?"

"Oh, no! Of course not!"

"Why of course not?"

"Because she died in Italy."

"Was she Italian?"

"I guess so."

"Have you never seen a portrait of her?"

"No, ma'am."

Miss Clement frowned. There seemed to be a mystery here. Possibly a scandal of some sort. And her interest quickened. "I suppose your father talks to you about her sometimes."

"No, ma'am."

"Never?"

"No, ma'am."

"Of course he has told you where you were born?"

"P'r'aps."

"Perhaps what?"

"P'r'aps he did."

"But you don't remember?"

"No, ma'am."

Nobody likes to be thwarted in the pursuit of knowledge. In this case it seemed to Miss Clement that the deeper she delved the less she found.

"Don't you remember ever having seen a portrait of her?"

"Of course not."

"Why of course not?"

"Because there isn't any."

This seemed a good reason. But Miss Clement felt that either she—or this boy—was being deceived.

The Vandal, whose drowsy eyes had scarcely moved from the study of her face since she entered the room, saw the look of disappointment. It was a somewhat petulant expression in which she would not have indulged had her host been twenty years older. But he saw it so clearly that he was moved to sympathy. With all the joy and enthusiasm of a great idea, he exclaimed: "My father may know all about her. I will ask him to tell you!"

A chill of horror swept up Miss Clement's spine. She suddenly realized what awful mischief a youthful savage—either from ignorance or perversity—might

accomplish. She stood up. "No! Don't mention it to him—nor to anybody."

"Why not?"

"Because you mustn't."

She could see, in the Vandal's face as he looked up at her, that he enjoyed this—to him—unaccountable fright. He even laughed. "There's nothing to be afraid of."

"No, of course not!" And she tried to smile. "But promise me you will not ask your father, nor anybody else."

To this super-sensitive lady there appeared in his uplifted eyes a cruel, triumphant delight, as he said—"Why did you ask if you don't want to know about her?"

"Merely in the way of conversation. And she added, with her sweetest smile—"merely from a friendly interest. You are a nice boy, and you understand, I am sure."

He nodded; but his eyes, in their slumbrous wisdom, seemed almost contemptuous.

"Promise me," she insisted. "Promise me you will say nothing about it to anybody."

"Yes, I promise."

"You are a nice little boy—and I must go, now. I will call again in a day or two. Good by."

He bowed as he said good-by. Then he followed her out into the hall, ran before her and held the door wide open. As she passed out he bowed again; the same deferential obeisance with which he had first

greeted her—as from Louis XIV to the Queen of Spain.

As Miss Clement crossed the common on her way home she saw a group of children looking skywards, and she heard the word "Eagle." She stopped, and also looked up. And as she looked, and watched the bird, floating tranquilly in the upper air, in a wide, slow circle, majestically, with no apparent effort, so high above the earth that he might be a visitor from another planet—she recalled the words of her recent host: "What's the use of crawling about on the earth like a bug? I'd rather be a bird."

An hour later Dr. Alton returned afoot. He had left his horse in the village to be shod. As he walked up the driveway he noticed a figure standing on the mounting block before the house. It was so enveloped in the golden glories of a setting sun that Dr. Alton failed, at first, to recognize his own son. The figure seemed a part of the sunset—more an ethereal spirit than an earthly boy. Cyrus was standing erect and motionless, his head thrown back as if inhaling inspiration from the radiance about him. Such prolonged and voluntary immobility would be unusual in any boy. Moreover, Cyrus maintained this attitude, forgetting—or ignoring—the customary greeting to his father. After waiting a moment before his strangely indiffer-

ent son, a feeling of uneasiness began to mingle with Dr. Alton's surprise.

At the foot of the block sat Zac, looking up at the silent boy. And Zac, also, might be a little off in his mind for he, too, failed to welcome or even to notice the returning parent.

At last Dr. Alton spoke. "What's the matter, Cyrus? Dreaming you are a bird?"

Slowly Cyrus lowered his face, his eyes still shut. And slowly the eyes were opened as if waking from a sleep. They showed a mild surprise at his father's presence. But he answered, in a low voice, as if his spirit still lingered elsewhere:

"Somebody wants us."

"Who?"

"I don't know."

"But you know who told you."

"No, sir. Nobody told me."

"What do you mean, Cyrus? Wake up. Is it an emergency call?"

Cyrus raised a hand and pointed before him, toward the south.

"It comes from off there."

Dr. Alton frowned, less from irritation than from fear that this foolish utterance of his son might be the forerunner of some future spiritualistic obsession—or other mental derangement.

But he spoke gently. "Whose house do you think it is?"

"Oh, I don't know at all! It comes from way off—

way off! It's in the air; not a loud sound, like somebody near. More like a—like a—breath."

"What does it say?"

"It says—it says—oh, I dunno. It isn't words."

"Then how do you know they want me?"

"It wants us both. It wants me too."

Dr. Alton smiled. "Do they want your help as another doctor?"

But Cyrus did not return the smile. He obviously regarded the message with a certain solemnity—and awe. Again he closed his eyes and again turned up his face.

"It is still coming."

"What is still coming, Cyrus? The same message?"

"Yes, sir, the same message—that we are wanted there."

"Where?"

"I don't know. But it isn't anywheres near here. It's a good ways off. And we are wanted very much;—oh, very much!"

Dr. Alton turned away. "Well, Cyrus, when you get your message in more definite form I shall be glad to consider it."

As he entered the house, however, he stood in the doorway a moment, looking back. Cyrus was still standing on the mounting block, with face upturned. On the ground sat Zac, still waiting patiently for his hero to return to earth.

When Cyrus followed his father into the house he

found him warming himself before the open fire. He approached and stood before him.

"Father, why isn't there a picture of my mother somewhere round the house?"

Dr. Alton raised his eyebrows at the unexpected question. "Why do you ask, Cyrus?"

"'Cause somebody was here to-day who wanted to know."

"Who?"

With a knowing shake of the head the diplomat answered, "Oh, I mustn't tell you. I promised not to."

"Well, you must keep your promise."

"But why isn't there one?"

"It's a long story, Cyrus. Some day I will tell you, but not just now."

"But why not now? This is when I want to know. I may forget about it."

Dr. Alton was familiar with the gimlet quality of the youthful mind. "Well—Cyrus—let us wait and see if you forget it. And if you——" At that moment he happened to look more carefully at a letter in his hand, delivered during his absence and which he had just taken from the table. Cyrus waited for him to go on. He waited in vain. Dr. Alton stepped hastily to the window for more light, and read the letter. It was evidently of unusual interest, as he forgot to finish his sentence. And when, at last, Cyrus asked him to continue he did not even hear his son's voice.

The letter was written in a woman's hand, and in French.

At the supper table that evening father and son were sitting alone, as usual. The son was talkative, but the father was silent; so silent that Cyrus, at last discouraged by the complete indifference of a usually sympathetic audience, became silent himself.

And the father had abundant material for thought. He was trying to understand how the message in the letter had reached the boy. By what mysterious agency had this yearning of a woman's heart stirred the brain of the far away Cyrus? Could there be a harmony between these two spirits so intimate as to render the written word superfluous? These were questions he tried in vain to answer.

When the meal was finished and Joanna began to clear away the things, Dr. Alton surprised her by asking if Cyrus had a good suit of clothes.

"A good suit of clothes! Of course he has!"

"I mean, a nice new suit, that is becoming to him."

"He has that pretty dark suit with the wide collar that he wears Sundays."

"Yes,—yes—I know—but would that be good enough to wear in New York."

"In New York? Is Cyrus going to New York?" And there was a ring of dismay in Joanna's voice.

"I think so."

"When?"

"To-morrow."

"What for?"

Dr. Alton hesitated. "I have some—sort of business there and—will take him with me."

"Will he stay long?"

"Only a day or two."

"Heaven be praised! I began to be frightened."

The doctor laughed. "You needn't worry, Joanna. We shall come back alive—and very soon."

The next day Cyrus and his father were in the wicked city. The important business of the following morning was taking the boy to a fashionable establishment and fitting him out in stylish raiment. And when the deed was done Dr. Alton realized that Cyrus, in these new, well fitting clothes, with his intelligent face and erect little figure, was not a boy to be ashamed of.

"To-night," said Dr. Alton, "we go to the opera."

"Opera." And Cyrus repeated the new word. "Opera. What is that, father?"

"It's a theater, where they sing."

"Isn't the circus better?"

"Well, yes; sometimes it is better. But you come to the opera with me to-night and to-morrow I will take you to the Hippodrome. That's fair, isn't it?"

Cyrus agreed that it was.

To a boy of eight, who has never been to any theater, Grand Opera is a strong beginning. When he and his father took their seats—seats not too far from the stage—Cyrus, in wonder, looked about him and above him, at the vast auditorium, the gorgeous architecture, the radiant women and their flashing jewels. And so many of them! This was a new world of which he had never heard. Wide open were his eyes; also his

mouth—and all his senses. He absorbed everything. The overture filled him to the brim with a celestial joy. Such music he had not imagined. Then, to his surprise, all the lights were lowered and the vast chamber was in gloom. And when, the next moment, the great curtain began slowly to ascend, disclosing the scene behind, then, indeed, came the culmination of his joy and amazement.

What followed was bewildering—the music and the changing lights; the peasants, the soldiers and the kings and queens. And everybody singing! Then the ballet, with the fairies! The boy was enchanted.

But, among the many figures, there was one that stood out the clearest. It was a woman. Her face, her voice, her singing and her story moved him beyond any of the others. The words that were sung were strange words and they told him nothing, but he guessed the story. This lovely woman with a lovely voice had a diadem in her hair and was in trouble—troubled by a hateful man in splendid clothes, with lavender legs. But, however deep her trouble, she sang so well and in such a heavenly voice that the whole audience applauded her, again and again. It was clear, even to a child, that she was the queen of the evening, the star of stars. And once, between two acts, when she came out upon the stage, between the good lover and the wicked nobleman, bowing to the audience in acknowledgment of flowers, Cyrus saw, and saw so clearly there was no mistake, that she looked directly at him, Cyrus, and at his father! And

as she saw them, she bowed and smiled more radiantly than ever! And so clear it was that he looked up and whispered:

“Why, father, she was bowing to us!”

He saw his father was smiling back at her as he murmured, “Yes—she is.”

That, in itself, was exhilarating.

But no human boy can withstand for an infinity of time an infinity of new emotions—however delectable. At the end of the second hour Cyrus’ head was resting against his father’s arm, and his eyes were closed. But in his sleep he heard the music. In his dreams came the voice of the Lovely Lady. His eyes, only, were closed. In his ears, and to his weary but enchanted brain came all except the actual vision. When his father woke him from this gentle sleep the great curtain was slowly descending at the end of the final act. Music filled the air,—volumes and volumes of it. Countless people were on the stage; kings and queens, lords and ladies, peasants and soldiers, all singing their loudest. So many noisy people Cyrus had never heard. And in the center among the kings and queens was the Lovely Lady, also singing.

A few moments later, after the great curtain had descended, a half dozen of the principal singers came filing out in front of it, holding hands, and bowing and smiling to the audience. The Lovely Lady received heaps of flowers. And her eyes, as she bowed and smiled, rested for a moment on Cyrus himself.

The next day, as to weather, was disappointing.

The cold, damp air, the leaden sky and the flurries of snow were a surprise to Cyrus, as it was just plain, country weather, and bad at that. It seemed out of place in a fine, big city. And he was again surprised, in the afternoon, when his father took him into Central Park. He considered it a waste of time, when so much of the city had not been seen. They walked along the borders of a lake, through some woods, then followed a path up a little hill. And, two or three times, when they came to other paths, his father took from his pocket the French letter he had received at home, and seemed to study it as if it told him where to go. On one of these halts the boy protested.

"Why do we come here, father? We can see trees at home."

"Yes, you are right, Cyrus. But we go only a little further." And when they came to a rustic bench in a secluded spot, quite hidden among trees and shrubs, Dr. Alton seated himself.

"Are you tired?" Cyrus asked. Dr. Alton looked at his watch. "No, I am not tired."

"Then let's go back to the city, and be seeing things."

His father laid a hand on his shoulder and patted it.

"There is no hurry. We can wait a minute. It is rather pleasant here, don't you think?" Then he looked along the path in both directions as if expecting something. Cyrus was too polite to say what he really thought, so he merely scowled and swung his legs, hitting the toe of one foot against the heel of the other. Meanwhile his father kept looking along

the path by which they had come as if expecting something.

And something came.

It was a lady, and she was hurrying toward them. Instead of going by she stopped and greeted Dr. Alton. And the greeting was more than friendly. There were kisses, and they stood for a moment in each other's arms. Tears were on her cheeks when she stooped down and put both hands on Cyrus' shoulders and looked earnestly into his face. In her own face there was a look of excitement, and of joy. More tears came to her eyes. And her eyes were full of expression, with a peculiar droop, that gave an air of calmness and repose. She kissed the boy,—kissed him several times—then held him at arm's length, said something in a foreign language—then kissed him again. Although she was evidently an important person, and beautiful and kind and very gentle and affectionate—and he liked her furs as he stroked them—nevertheless Cyrus accepted her attentions with surprise, and with a mild resentment. No woman had ever treated him in this manner, and these caresses embarrassed him. Moreover, her face and voice awakened memories—memories as of fairy tales with music—of things unreal, yet positive, and fresh in his mind. His frown was from an effort to remember what her face and voice recalled. At last, of a sudden, the clouds vanished. Into his puzzled brain poured a flood of light. The frown gave way to a smile of triumph as he ex-

claimed, holding her at arm's length with both hands against her chest:

"Oh, I know now! You are the lady of last night!"

She looked up at Dr. Alton for a translation but guessed the meaning. And when it came she nodded, laughed and confessed—but in a language Cyrus did not understand, although familiar to his ears. Seating herself on the rustic bench, she held Cyrus in her lap, and with Dr. Alton as interpreter they conversed together. She asked many questions: if he was happy, in good health, what he thought and how he spent his time, and lots of other things. And Cyrus was delighted to learn more about her strange adventures of last night. And to know that the wicked man with lavender legs could do her no harm.

She was certainly a wonderful lady, as charming now as in the story of last night. And Cyrus asked many questions about that story, all of which she answered. Of course, it was slow and troublesome not understanding her language—nor she his, except a few words—but Dr. Alton was a willing translator. It all ended, however, in an unexpected way. After one of her embraces, more affectionate even than the others, Cyrus startled his two companions by asking in the joyful voice that comes with a grand discovery:—

"Are you my mother?"

With a frightened look she drew back. The last word she understood. Instead of answering she glanced up at his father, as if for assistance. Into Dr.

Alton's face, also, had come a look of alarm; then a frown. But he answered pleasantly:

"No—Cyrus. No. Why should you ask such a question?"

"Because she acts just as Elmer Snow's mother acted when he came back from the hospital."

When this was translated she leaned back, bowed her head, and covered her face with her hands. When she raised her head there were fresh tears on her cheeks.

Cyrus apologized. "I am very sorry. I didn't mean anything—in particular. I only—just thought I'd ask."

She patted his shoulder to assure him no harm was done.

"This lady, Cyrus, is an old friend of mine," said his father. "And is very glad to see you and is sorry you have no mother. That's all."

Now Cyrus would sooner doubt a voice from heaven than his father's word; and any one could easily see that the lady was much disturbed—so much disturbed that it shortened the interview. The parting with his father seemed painful and took a long time. Both had much to say. They seemed to cling to each other, and he kissed her several times. At last, after a tearful farewell to Cyrus, with a long embrace in which her wet cheeks were pressed long against his face, she hurried away.

There was sorrow in his drowsy eyes as he watched the departing figure. No woman had ever treated him

in such a way, and he had begun to like it. Before she disappeared around a curve in the path, even before the sound of her pleasant voice had died away in his ears—something happened!

A fat, gray squirrel, followed by another fat, gray squirrel jumped upon the bench just where the lady had been sitting! And there they sat almost within reach!

He was young. Within a month the unexplained lady, her face, her voice and her caresses had begun to fade from his unfledged memory. But the two gray squirrels, almost within reach, sitting up with their funny little hands crossed upon their portly stomachs, he remembered clearly.



VI

HE ALMOST GETS RELIGION

CYRUS was in bed.

The history of the case is instructive and should be a warning to other champions.

On a certain afternoon in the fourteenth year of this hero's life the home team had met and defeated the baseball club from a neighboring village. The score was twenty to thirteen. Such a victory deserved celebration. So Cyrus, with half a dozen fellow champions, went to Mrs. Turner's little ice cream parlor and regaled themselves. Each boy had three ice creams, and as the money still held out they decided on a fourth. But Mrs. Turner, having a friendly interest in her patrons, declined to be further identified with this particular debauch.

To victors in the national game this was humiliating. Defeat in an ice cream parlor, after triumph on the diamond, was not to be accepted. So they adjourned to the store where a fresh lot of cocoanut cakes had

just come in. These cakes were not dry and fly blown like their predecessors. They were fresh, full and well rounded, soft and juicy and nicely browned on top. Wilbur Cobb said he could eat a dozen. But Cyrus, familiar with the deceptive richness of cocoanut cakes, said no boy could eat a dozen, but that he, Cyrus, could eat more than Wilbur. This aroused the sporting instinct of the party and it was arranged, on the spot, that these two champions should compete. The boy who ate the most should pay nothing toward the cost of the cakes. The cakes were two cents a piece.

Cyrus won. He ate nine and claimed, with justice, that were it not for the space already occupied by the ice cream and sponge cake he could have eaten still more.

Half an hour later these same boys, in passing through Deacon Bisbee's orchard, found the taste of green apples cool and refreshing, for the moment, after the somewhat milky fullness caused by the ice cream and cocoanut cakes. And they partook with reckless freedom. What exclamations of surprise or warning may have passed between those hereditary foes, the ice cream and green apples, when the apples entered those overworked stomachs is not recorded. But the apples conquered as easily as the Barbarians when they entered Rome. For green apples, on occasion, resemble Truth: they are mighty and will prevail. And Cyrus, after starting homeward, began to feel, in that region between his chest and legs, as if he had swallowed a football. The distention was painful. Moreover, as

he hurried on, the football seemed growing bigger and harder. Also, it showed signs of life. From his interior came rumblings; the rumblings that precede a storm. All through this central zone, this sphere of distention, pains were starting up, sharp, swift, far reaching. It appeared to him that through his equator lightning played. At first these playful spasms darted here and there in a frolicsome way—like airy nothings. Though somewhat threatening and reverberant they did not alarm him. They seemed well intentioned pains, like harmless gleams of lightning on a summer night. But these spasms became less friendly. They grew sharper and more threatening. Soon, like flashes in a real storm, they were shooting here and there as if rending him asunder; no longer playful, but the kind of lightning that rips the bark from trees, tears bricks from chimneys, and spires from churches. When near his own home this storm within grew fiercer yet, and wilder in its fury. So sharp the agony that he clasped the afflicted territory with both his hands, and leaned for support against a fence.

Never before, in his brief career, had he realized that the human body could be rent and plowed and torn to shreds without killing the owner.

At that moment Mrs. Eagan came along. Mrs. Eagan had a large face, a large chest, large hips and a large heart. And she was carrying a large basket—of things for the wash. Cyrus withdrew his hands from that region where the tempest raged, straightened up, lifted his hat and bowed. And it was done

as respectfully as if Mrs. Eagan were the leading lady of the land. Mrs. Eagan, with a smile of pleasure, returned the salutation, not gracefully perhaps, for she was hampered by the heavy basket. She knew Cyrus, and she knew that in his courtesy to her sex he made no distinctions. She knew that if the Queen of Sheba were passing at the same moment, the Queen of Sheba would have received an obeisance not a bit more deferential than the obeisance to Mrs. Eagan. But as she looked more carefully at the boy's face, her friendly eyes saw clearly there was trouble.

"Why, Cyrus! Are ye sick? Ye are as white as a sheet."

"Yes'm." He spoke in a fade-a-way voice, and he smiled from sheer force of will. "I feel very—very—I don't know." And one of his hands moved instinctively to the sphere of revolt. His head drooped, partly from pain; partly from shame that these awful spasms had weakened his legs and might effect his courage.

"'Tis there ye are sufferin'? 'Tis the belly ache?"

Cyrus nodded. "Yes—Mrs. Eagan—and I never—had—such a——" The lips quivered, his head sank lower and he leaned against the fence for support. Mrs. Eagan laid down her basket. Then closer to the smaller white face came the larger red one.

"D'ye feel so bad as that, little man?"

Cyrus nodded, with lips tight pressed to conceal a quivering he could not control. He looked into the light blue eyes, now near his own, and tried to smile.

Mrs. Eagan said no more. Cyrus felt an arm behind his legs, another across his back, and he was lifted from the earth. She lifted him in her arms—as Hercules might have lifted a spring lamb. With his head against her shoulder she carried him easily up the long driveway to his own home.

There were sleepless hours that night, and Cyrus did some unusual thinking on important subjects. For, as it happened, he had recently read portions of the Old Testament, quite by accident, and was much impressed, temporarily, by certain statements of the Hebrew fathers. He inferred from that book that the Ruler of the Universe was watchful and vindictive, and dependent upon constant praise; that for any dodging of this praise and worship hell fire and eternal damnation were ordinary penalties; that the sins of the fathers were visited upon the children, forever and ever—which seemed unfair. The impression of all this upon his youthful mind was that any person who really believed these things must be either impossibly good or scared to death. While in good health those awful utterances did not worry him. Now, however, in the silent hours of the night, weakened by the devastation in his interior, he became less callous to such warnings. Those Hebrew fathers, backed by the vindictive Almighty, might get him before daylight and consign him, forever, to the fires of hell.

But at last he slept. And when he awoke the sun was shining in his chamber—and he was still alive! However, when Joanna came up with his toast and tea,

and sat at his bedside, he was still haunted by the awful prophecies of the Hebrew fathers and by the suspicion that the Avenging Deity might still have an eye on him.

Joanna was a well-built woman of forty, with good features and an honest face. For nearly twenty years she had lived in the Alton family as housekeeper, nurse, companion, cook, friend and servant: and, incidentally, as mother to Cyrus. While Joanna's education had been scanty, her common sense was abundant. Her attendance at church was regular, and Cyrus felt, naturally, that her views on Paradise and Purgatory could be relied on. So he asked if religious people were more likely to get to heaven than other folks.

"Of course," said Joanna.

"Which kind are the surest?"

"The Good People."

"I mean, which kind of religion is the—is the safest?"

"Each one thinks his own is."

"Which do you think, Joanna?"

"Congregationalist."

"Is that yours?"

"Yes."

"Do they have a better chance than Baptists or Methodists or Unitarians?"

"I guess they do."

"But the Unitarians have the biggest church."

"Yes—in this village."

"What do they believe,—the Unitarians?"

Joanna closed her eyes. "Oh, I can't tell you ex-

actly. They believe something about God being the only thing to worship—the most important of all.”

“Well,—isn’t He?”

“Why—er—yes.”

“What’s bigger?”

Joanna frowned. “Bigger than what?”

“Bigger than God?”

“Why, nothing, I suppose.”

Then it seems to me He is the One to be friends with.” And Cyrus leaned back on the pillow, and turned his face toward the light. Joanna stroked his head.

“But don’t you worry, little boy. You are not goin’ to die just because you are sick.”

“Are you sure?”

“Of course I am sure, so is your father sure. Tomorrow you will be all well again.”

“Yes, but I shall die some day and I might as well be ready. You think the Congregashalists have the best chance of getting to heaven.”

“Yes.”

“Then I’ll be one. What do I have to do?”

“Nothing, but just go to church.”

“Is God a Congregashalist?”

Joanna hesitated. “Well—nobody really knows.”

“Not even a minister?”

“Perhaps he would. But you have asked enough questions. Now try and go to sleep.”

Cyrus obeyed, and slept. But that evening when his father came up and was sitting by the bed he made

further efforts to get light on the darkest of all subjects. Dr. Alton, however, saw signs of a feverish excitement in the usually calm eyes of the invalid, and he decided upon a soothing course of religious instruction. He knew that this sudden thirst for knowledge in a fresh field could not be allayed by any off-hand advice to forget and slumber. So with a smiling face he answered questions as if the matter in hand was of no immediate importance.

"Father, was Jesus so very good?" Cyrus began.

"Yes, indeed! The best of men!"

"He wasn't better than you, I bet."

"Indeed he was, Cyrus; very, very much better."

"Ho!" said the boy; "I don't believe it."

Dr. Alton explained, in few words, certain important differences between Our Savior and other men. Cyrus listened, and understood; then inquired:

"Was He a Congregashalist?"

"Dr. Alton smiled, and shook his head. "Never, Cyrus! Never! He couldn't have been if he tried. And He was not the man to try. There was no cruelty in him. He was all forgiveness."

"Then he must have been a Unitarian, a Piscopalian, or Baptist or Methodist—or something like that."

Dr. Alton closed his eyes and stroked his chin.

"No—I should say not. He might possibly have been a Universalist, or a Unitarian. But why are you so interested in religion all of a sudden? Afraid you are going to die?"

"No, not now. But all last night I was afraid."

His father took one of the small hands in both his own and smiled into the invalid's adoring face. "There's no hurry about choosing your creed, little man. Benevolent Creators are not punishing children for theological errors. But we can talk it all over later, when you are well."

Cyrus also smiled—"But tell me, father, just for fun, what religion is the best?"

"Well, Cyrus, that's hard to say. There are many to choose from."

"Why, I thought the Christian religion was the only real one."

"Well, that's what the Christians think—naturally."

Cyrus frowned. "But what's the use of so many?"

"No use whatever. One good one would be enough for everybody—and save heaps of trouble."

"But the Christian religion is the best, isn't it—to go to heaven with?"

"That's hard to say. Nobody really knows. It's a good Sunday religion, but it doesn't seem to work so well week days."

"I guess it's safer than any of the others, isn't it?"

"Possibly. But you needn't decide in a hurry, Cyrus. Take your time and look around a little."

"Do people always look around before choosing their religion?"

Dr. Alton laughed. "No, they do not. In fact, it is considered a sign of moral depravity to think too much for yourself in those matters. To be at peace with mankind you must follow your neighbors. It is

all merely a matter of geography. When you know the name of the country you know their religious beliefs. There is not much thinking done."

"That's funny," said Cyrus. "But a Christian is lots better than any of the others—isn't he?"

Again Dr. Alton smiled. "Well, he himself thinks he is. But all virtue is not centered in the Christian. When you get up to-morrow and wish to get well and strong you will begin to eat again, won't you?"

"Gracious! I guess I will! I could eat a house."

"Yes, you will be hungry enough. And you will feel like eating quite a variety of things, I suppose."

"Oh, won't I!" And as Cyrus spoke the pallor of the Saint was submerged in a glow of fleshly desire.

"Good! And you shall have it! Now we will play, for a minute, that Christianity is pie."

"Is what?"

"Is pie. Just pie. But there are various creeds of pie among the Christians; there's apple, pumpkin, mince, squash, cocoanut, and all the others."

"Me for cocoanut!" exclaimed the invalid. "Cocoanut pie beats 'em all!"

"That's a matter of taste. But you prefer coacoanut pie to all the others?"

"Oh, yes!"

"Very well. Now there's apple for Methodist, mince for Episcopalian, cocoanut for Unitarian, pumpkin for Congregationalist, and so on, through the list."

Cyrus laughed. "And which are you?"

"I haven't decided yet. But you must stick to your colors and have more faith in cocoanut than in all the others."

"Oh, yes! That's easy!"

"And so you eat nothing but cocoanut pie."

"Nothing else at all?"

"Nothing else. So long as you are a Christian you must stick to your creed. You must feel considerably wiser and better than outsiders who are eating grapes, and roast turkey and custards and watermelons, and pudding and ice cream, and all who eat anything except your one kind of pie."

"Oh, I couldn't do that!"

"But you must, if you want to be a true defender of your cocoanut creed. For all the others are outsiders. Those pudding, turkey, grapes, custard and ice cream people don't believe in your pie."

Cyrus slowly shook his head and pushed out his lips. "I couldn't despise people for eating things they liked."

"Neither could I, Cyrus. So, for the present, anyway, we will eat whatever we want to. And we are just as sure of going to Heaven as if we stuck to one kind of pie."

"Yes, we will," declared the invalid, and in his face and voice had come the enthusiasm of fresh hopes and a new life. "If our minister," he said, "would talk like that in the pulpit, about roast turkey and ice cream and things to eat, it would be more—more interesting. Wouldn't it?"

Dr. Alton bent over Cyrus and kissed him good

night. "Yes, but he wouldn't dare—unless his congregation consisted of empty boys."

The father's diagnosis was correct: his treatment a success. During that short half hour the patient had been converted from a terrified sinner to a hopeful gourmand. The anxious look had left his eyes. The lips were smiling.

And that night, instead of fitful wakings interspersed with dreams of hell and Hebrew prophets, of death, damnation and eternal punishment, he slept a solid, tranquil sleep. And such dreams as came were happy dreams. He dreamed of puddings of the richest kind, of turkeys all stuffed and ready; of various pies, of custard, of pastry, and of ice cream, all of which he ate, and ate—and ate. And lying flat upon his stomach on a sponge-cake raft he floated in a sea of pineapple sherbet. He would bite off edges of the raft, then, with his whole face in the boundless ocean, he would suck up long gulps of this divine material. And his permanent residence was in a cocoanut palace against a mountain of vanilla ice cream.

When morning came, and he awoke and sat up in bed, he was himself again. In the sunshine of his room the bottomless pit had lost its menace. His spirit, refreshed by slumber and now guided by his nose, ignored the fires of Purgatory and was hovering over the more friendly heat of Joanna's kitchen stove.

A few days later, when he was curled up at one end of the sofa with a book, he asked: "What is the transmigration of souls?"



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Dr. Alton explained.

Then Cyrus, after a good look into the face of the dog beside him: "Whose soul do you suppose is in Zac?"

"That's a hard one, Cyrus. I could only guess at it."

"But it means for dogs, too, doesn't it?"

"It certainly ought. I shouldn't accept it unless it did."

"Then I say that whatever soul came into Zac was the soul of a mighty good man."

"Yes—no doubt about that."

"Just think! Zac may be George Washington!"

"Well—you can't be too sure. You have all the good people in history to choose from, you know."

"Yes, of course. I guess, after all, he isn't George Washington. He is quicker and jumps about more." Then after another look into the dog's adoring face: "Besides, I don't believe any great man in history would be so awful fond of me as Zac is."

"Oh, he might be. Washington would have liked you, I think; although he might not have followed you about so closely."

Other famous men were mentioned: the Emperor Augustus, Magellan, Shakespeare, Daniel Boone and Fenimore Cooper—also Joan of Arc. But it was agreed by both father and son that the best known characteristics of those persons were not sufficiently obvious in Zac to make a clear case.



VII

TOWARD THE LIGHT

THE snow lay deep—and still it fell.

On a low stone wall by the roadside Ruth Heywood sat in solemn meditation. With melancholy eyes she watched the door of the little red school house a hundred yards away. On the porch of that school house shivered Zac, also waiting. He, too, kept his eyes on the door, but he had no intention of rebuking the prisoner—should he ever appear. Why try to improve an already perfect thing?

Above Ruth's head the North Wind, moaning through the leafless branches of the maples, played dirge-like airs. Now, late in the afternoon, the darkening sky seemed bearing down upon the snow-covered earth. And Ruth's thoughts were all in harmony with the world about her. There was reason for a joyless face. More experienced women than Ruth had found sorrow and defeat in acting as guardian angel to erring males.

Other children had gone home. Cyrus was being held in punishment. And the punishment was just. The Guardian Angel disliked this business, but Cyrus had no mother, aunt or sister, and his father, being only a man, did not realize the situation. Therefore, it seemed clear to Ruth that she was the chosen instrument by which Cyrus was to be rescued from a career of shame and failure.

At last the boy appeared. Zac bounced with joy, stirring the snowy air with cries of welcome. And Cyrus, glad as any other prisoner to be again at liberty, came running after.

Ruth walked out into the road and stood before him. As he stopped there was a smile on his face, the old familiar smile of the guilty, who hope to soften the face of Justice. But Justice was not beguiled. On the face of the Guardian Angel came no returning smile. Instead, with accusing eyes, she slowly shook her head.

"Cyrus, you ought to be ashamed."

"Why?"

"You know very well why. You are bad, very bad, and teacher was right to keep you after school and punish you."

Cyrus gave up smiling. He reached forth and toyed with one of the horn buttons on the Guardian Angel's coat. "I don't think I am bad just because I hate that geography."

"It's your duty to learn it whether you hate it or not. You will grow up an ignorant, good-for-nothing

man unless you study your lessons. Everybody knows that. You ought to go straight home and tell your father you have been kept after school. Just tell him all about it. Will you?"

There was a puckering of the boy's mouth, but no answer.

"If you were stupid, and couldn't learn if you tried, it would be different, but you are just perverse and—and bad. If you don't do better I shall just go and tell your father myself."

"Oh, Ruthy! You wouldn't do that!" And he let go the button and took a backward step, as one who shrinks from a faithless friend.

"But it's for your own good, Drowsy. And, besides, teacher will tell him if I don't."

"I s'pose she would."

"You don't want to grow up and know less than anybody else—even less than school children?"

Cyrus smiled. "That *would* be funny!"

"No, it would *not* be funny. Do you think it would be funny to dig ditches all your life and drive oxen like old Sim Barker?"

"But what makes him so bad is because he's foolish and dirty and has tobacco juice in the corners of his mouth. Geography wouldn't help *him*—nor anybody else. Geography!" And Cyrus uttered the word with a fathomless contempt. "That geography just makes me sick—just sick, sick, sick—and mad! What stuff it tells you! Which is the largest African Lake? Where are the Barbary States? What about the sur-

face of Abyssinia? What are the products of the Cape of Good Hope? Who in thunder cares for the climate of Uruguay or the exports of Ecuador? Who'd ever be such a fool as to want to remember the population of Thibet? And who cares anyway? Any jackass can know those things whenever he wants to by looking at a map or that fool geography."

"Oh, Cyrus, you mustn't talk like that!"

But the revolutionist went on. "Why don't they tell us things worth remembering? Look at my lesson to-day! The Island of Madagascar! Who in thunder wants to know about the products of Madagascar? Hoh! It makes me sick!"

"But, Drowsy, Madagascar is an important island and——"

"Important grandmother! Any fool can read about it. Why don't they tell me things I want to know?"

"What thing *do* you want to know?"

"I want to know things that other people don't know. I want to know how the earth looks when you are standing on the moon. I want to know what's lying in the mud at the bottom of the Tiber—all the bronze and gold and marble things; and what sort of people live on the other planets, and why cats and dogs can see in the dark. And if God is good and not mean—why did he make Bobby Carter a hunchback?"

"Oh, Cyrus! It's wicked to talk like that!"

"No, it isn't. I'm only asking about it. I'm only asking why teacher doesn't tell us things worth knowing. I want to know what would happen if you dug

a well through the center of the earth. Would a stone keep on dropping till it came out the other side?"

"That is gravity," said Ruth in her wisest manner, glad of a chance to hold her position as mentor.

"Yes, but the name doesn't help any. If I got into a big cannon ball and was shot up into the air how many hundreds of miles would I go before I would fall back? And if you should go up in a balloon a mile high I want to know if you would stay still and see the earth going round and round beneath you or would you have to go with it—and Massachusetts always just underneath."

"There's no use in knowing that."

"Yes, there is. When I'm grown up I may do something like it."

Ruth laughed. "You silly boy! Nobody ever did such a thing."

"But *I* may. Lots of things have been done that were never done before. And mighty surprisin' things, too!"

There was no denying this. So Ruth, for want of words, merely gazed upon him in sorrow and disapproval, as any Conservative might gaze upon any Radical. Before she could frame a speech to fit the look the orator again rushed on. He spoke rapidly and with feeling. The drowsy eyes became wider open. His hands with the gray mittens moved freely in the snowy air. To Ruth it was a sudden transformation of a prospective ignoramus into an inspired orator. In a higher, thinner voice he demanded: "What makes



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one kind of electricity do what another kind can't? And if men are so smart, why didn't they use electricity thousands of years ago instead of just now? The air has always been full of it."

This was an interesting question. But the Guardian Angel had no answer ready.

"And what makes light travel so fast? Why, just think of it, a hundred and fifty thousand miles in one second! And heat. There's lots to learn about heat. Why do folks burn wood and coal in winter instead of storing up heat in summer when there's too much of it. They keep ice all summer. And why not keep heat all winter? And just look at sunshine! Why not keep some overnight to read by? I could do it if I was a man."

The orator paused to get his breath.

"But, Cyrus, perhaps you can learn all those things later."

"But I want to know 'em now. Not the things I've just been reciting, the climate of Texas, the crops of New South Wales and the population of Wurtemberg. Hoh! I could be a teacher myself and tell things everybody knows already. Teachers are no smarter than anybody else. I asked her why some families, like the Herricks, have all boys and other families all girls."

"What did she say?"

"She just couldn't tell me. And she didn't like it when I asked her why God, who knows everything, should do foolish things."

"Oh, Cyrus!"

"Well, he makes warm days in April to start things going, then sends a sudden frost and nips the blossoms and kills the crops. Any fool farmer knows better than that."

Ruth frowned. "You should not say such things." But the orator ignored the rebuke. "Instead of telling me about the wrecks and ruins and the treasures and the forests at the bottom of the ocean, teacher tells me how many bales of cotton and barrels of molasses come from Alabama. Why, Ruthy, at the Island of St. Helena the ocean is nearly six miles deep!"

"But, Cyrus, nobody really knows just what lies at the bottom of the ocean."

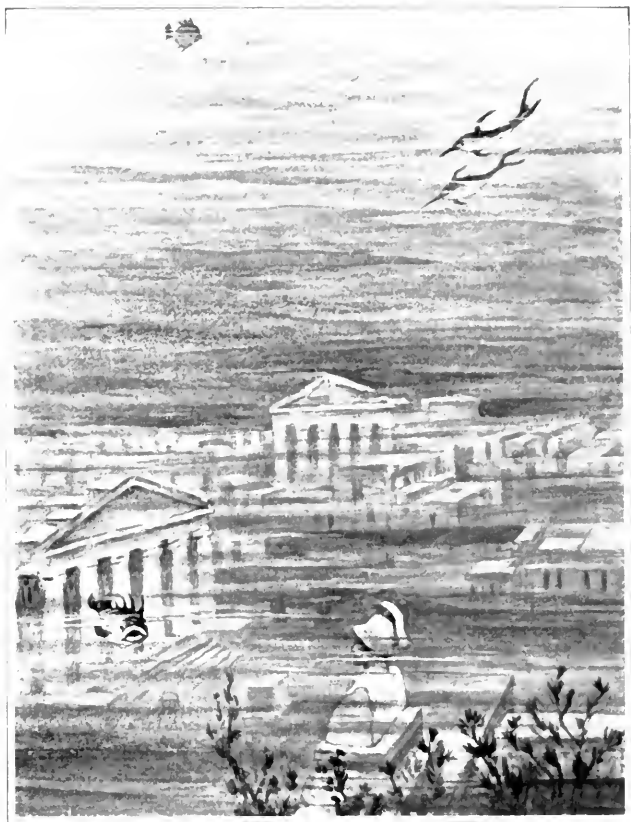
"Hoh! That's just it. Teacher stuffs us with things everybody knows. All the easy things. Any cow or any hen can know 'em. I want the other things. If she's a teacher she ought to know about the bottom of the sea. She ought to tell us about Atlantis. There's be some fun in that."

"Atlantis?"

"Yes. That was the big island out in the Atlantic Ocean that suddenly disappeared. It sank to the bottom of the sea. Don't you remember?"

Ruth was honest and slowly shook her head. Yet she knew that her position as mentor, spiritual guide and good example became weaker should the ignoramus she was rebuking display more learning than herself.

But Cyrus was too much absorbed in the bigness of his subject to think of himself or other trifles. "Why,



"AND NOW, TODAY, DOWN AT THE BOTTOM OF THE OCEAN, THOSE CITIES
AND THOSE MARBLE TEMPLES ARE STILL STANDING" *Page 123*

Ruthy, it was a whole kingdom, this island—a continent. It was covered with beautiful temples, whole cities and lots of people. And all of a sudden—nobody knows why—it disappeared beneath the waves! And now, to-day, down at the bottom of the ocean those cities and those marble temples are still standing!”

“Where was this island?”

“Off to the west of Spain, and Africa. People think the Azores and the Canary Islands are the tops of mountains of that sunken country.”

Ruth said nothing, but the enchanting eyes spoke plainly of surprise and wonder. “When did that happen?”

“Way back in ancient times; before Greece began.”

The enthusiasm of Cyrus produced its effect on Ruth, and the earnest eyes of Ruth had their usual effect on Cyrus. He laid one of his hands, in its gray worsted mitten, against the Guardian Angel’s chest. “And, Ruthy, just think of those white marble temples! Just think of the streets and houses! Think of all the statues and the helmets, shields and swords and spears all lying around down there at the bottom of the ocean! Think of all the ornaments in gold and silver! And think, that in those great white cities with all their treasure, coral and sea plants grow instead of trees! And the only living things are fishes swimming in and out among the statues and the monuments, the palaces, the forums and the ampitheaters.”

The orator drew a long breath, then in a lower tone :
"I'd give anything to spend a day in that place."

Little batches of snow had gathered on the heads and shoulders of the two children. For a moment they stood in silence, Ruth gazing thoughtfully at Cyrus, Cyrus gazing in anger and contempt toward the school house.

At this point there came a sudden change in the Guardian Angel's manner. She realized the necessity for different tactics. Familiar with Cyrus's astonishing cleverness in argument she suspected that he was justifying his own guilt by this dazzling display of wisdom. Then came a swift transformation in the irresistible eyes, from sympathy to rebuke.

"Stop," she said.

Cyrus stopped—midway in a sentence.

"Those reasons you can tell to teacher. They are no excuse for being a lazy boy ; I shall tell your father unless you do better."

Then she turned and walked away, striking her cold hands together for warmth. Cyrus followed, treading the narrow path in the snow made by horse's feet.

But shivering Zac, who had good excuse for shivering after his long wait on the windy porch, ran joyfully ahead. He had borne with patience this long delay. Cyrus picked up a handful of snow and molded it into a ball. As they were passing the store he caught Ruth by a sleeve and pointed to a boy more than a hundred feet away. The boy was stooping over a sled.

"What'll you bet I can't hit Luther from here?"

Now Cyrus was a surprisingly good shot. He seemed able to hit whatever he fired at, and from unbelievable distances. His surprising accuracy in this direction had made him pitcher on the village nine. But Ruth, remembering her rôle as Guardian Angel, merely turned about and started on again in dignified silence. But from the corners of her eyes she watched the unsuspecting Luther, for she knew the missile would reach its mark. Her silent prophecy was correct. Through the snowy air the missile flew. It landed, with force, on the victim's back, just below his neck. He straightened up and looked about. Then with a shout of defiance he scooped a handful of snow, quickly rolled it into a ball and sent it toward the enemy. Here the unexpected happened. The snow ball, thrown in a hurry, would have missed Cyrus by a yard or more even had Fate allowed it to go its way. But Deacon Phineas Whitlock intervened. This stern old puritan of ferocious aspect, of iron will and despotic temper, the terror of children and of all other habitual sinners, was just passing Cyrus in solemn dignity, toward the store.

The snowy sphere forwarded by Luther landed full upon the deacon's mouth. And, as the deacon's mouth happened to be partly open at the time—from his habit of preaching to himself—he received within it a portion of the missile as it smashed and spread about his face. Swiftly he wiped his face with the back of a hand. His temper was a hot one. Luther knew it,

and he grabbed the rope to his sled and disappeared down the hill behind the store, with a velocity no elderly deacon could hope to attain. Spluttering and wiping snow from his mouth and nose he turned threatening eyes on Cyrus. In a voice between a gasp and a shout of rage he demanded:

"Who is that boy?" Who is he? What's his name?"

Cyrus shook his head. "I don't know, sir."

"Yes, you do! Who is he? What's his name?"

"I don't know, sir. Honestly I don't."

"Don't know, you young rascal! You have eyes. What's his name?"

But Cyrus, with a protesting, most polite and sorrowful gesture with both his hands, again proclaimed his ignorance. "I really don't know, sir. The air is so full of snow I didn't see his face."

Deacon Whitlock again spluttered. His speech was incoherent, but doubt and anger were plainly indicated. However, he turned away—still muttering.

Then the Guardian Angel approached the liar. "Cyrus Alton! How can you do such a thing?"

"What thing?"

"Deacon Whitlock knows perfectly well you knew who it was, and that you told him a lie. And he will despise you for it. So would everybody else. So do I despise you for it."

His only answer to this was a look of mingled sorrow and remonstrance. Then, instead of trying to defend himself, as the Guardian Angel expected, he

looked away. He also heaved a sigh,—a sigh of weariness and discouragement, an unboylike, elderly sigh such as grown-ups use.

The Guardian Angel continued. "And I should think you would be ashamed to be such a coward."

Cyrus stiffened at the word. "A coward!"

"Yes, coward. People only lie when they are afraid. If you had been brave you would have told the truth."

"But, Ruthy, you don't understand. I did it to save Luther. If Deacon Whitlock knew who it was he would tell Luther's father and Luther might get a lickin'."

Ruth shook her head. "Your duty was to tell the truth—or say nothing."

"No, sirree! That isn't true. The Bible says do unto others as you'd like to have other fellers do unto you. And I did just what I would want Luther to do for me."

This line of defense was confusing, and Ruth was familiar with his skill in argument. She knew well enough the pitfalls he could dig for the embarrassment of any adversary. So, regarding him with the sternest look she could bring into a very gentle face, she said:

"It is wrong to tell lies and you know it is. And you are bad—just bad. Why don't you button up your coat in front? The snow is actually blowing down your neck."

And she drew the collar of his overcoat closer about his throat and tried to fasten it. "Why, the button is

gone! Joanna ought to see to it. You really ought to have a mother, Drowsy. You aren't half taken care of."

This time Cyrus had nothing to say in his own defense. She laid a hand against his cheek. "Your face is hot. I believe you are sick now!"

Cyrus smiled, and nodded. "I shouldn't wonder if I was."

"Why? How do you feel?"

"Oh, sort of—sort of—funny."

"How, funny?"

"I don't know. Sort of cold and then hot and then cold—and kind of trembly. That's why I didn't hit Luther on the head instead of down on his back."

"Now, Cyrus Alton, you go straight home and tell your father just how you feel. Tell him all about it." Then, with increasing severity: "It's a shame you haven't got a mother. I believe it is because you are bad and that's the way God punishes you."

Then she turned away and started on again, Cyrus close behind. In front of her own home she stopped suddenly and wheeled about;—so suddenly that Cyrus walked against her. He took a backward step, and as they looked into each other's faces he said, quietly:

"No, it doesn't."

Ruth's eyes opened wide, in surprise. "Doesn't what?"

"It doesn't mean what you asked."

"But, Drowsy, I didn't ask anything!"

"You thought it, though."

"Thought what?"

"That because I told lies now I would not be an honest man when I grew up. But that isn't so. I *shall* be an honest man."

"Yes, but I hadn't spoken a word. How could you tell what I was going to say?"

"Oh, I dunno. I can often do that."

"Yes, you have done it before, but how do you do it? How do you know? Just guess at it?"

"No. It sort of comes—as if—well—just the usual way—only without the words waiting to be spoken. I guess it's natural enough."

"Natural enough! Why, it's most mysterious. Nobody else does it."

"Oh, p'r'aps lots of people do it. We don't know everybody."

"But if many people did it we should have heard about them. No, it's very mysterious. Why, Drowsy, I had just opened my lips to say your being such a liar now proves you will be a dishonest man and you said, before I uttered a word, 'No, it doesn't.' "

Cyrus smiled. "I guess it must be a sort of telegraphing without wires, like that man Marconi has just discovered."

For a moment they stood in silence, Ruth looking earnestly into the boy's slumbrous, half smiling eyes, trying vainly to explain the unexplainable. "It's all the harder to understand," she said, "because you could only see the back of my head. And this horrid storm was blowing between us."

"Yes, it's funny, and I dunno much about it. But I believe I could get it if I wasn't seeing you at all; I mean, if you were way off, out of sight."

"Really?"

"Yes, sir! I believe I could. Let's try it some day. Will you?"

"Yes, little Drowsy, when ever you say."

Once more she laid a hand against his face.

"Your cheeks are hot again. Now you go straight home and tell your father just how you feel, and have Joanna sew on that button. Will you?"

"Yep. All right."

He started off. About a dozen yards away he stopped and looked back. She was still standing where he left her, and was watching him. The obvious lack of confidence in his promise—or her air of authority with all this military discipline caused a momentary revolt. He picked up a handful of snow, rolled it quickly in a ball and threw it. She saw it coming, but merely bent her head and lifted an arm in protection.

'Twas a good shot. But the snowball, being soft, merely broke against her arm. Ruth lowered the arm and raised her head, slowly and calmly, as a Guardian Angel who is invulnerable to earthly weapons. She pointed toward his home.

Cyrus raised his cap, moved it grandly through the air in a sweeping curve, bowed very low, then turned and marched away.

He walked with no suspicion of pursuit. But Ruth

had obeyed a sudden impulse. She started forward on a run, and when close behind him gave a sudden push with both hands. He tumbled forward into a drift and rolled over on his back. As he started to get up, she pounced on him with all her weight. Then with both knees on his chest she rubbed his face with snow.

Had the assailant been another boy, Cyrus would have kicked and struck and fought him off. But you do not kick and strike your aunts, your mother or your best girl. So, he merely pushed and wriggled about, with eyes and mouth tight shut.

Zac seemed to enjoy the business as much as Ruth. He barked and plunged about as if cheering for the victor.

Well into Cyrus's face Ruth rubbed the snow. "Take that, you horrid boy, and that, and that!"

With a triumphant laugh she took her knees from his chest, jumped to her feet and ran away. And as she ran she expected just what happened. For Cyrus, also quickly on his feet, drew the backs of his mittens across his eyes for clearer vision, then sent a snowball toward the vanishing figure. It landed between her shoulders. But she ignored it, and ran into her own house without even a backward glance.

For a moment Cyrus stood and watched her, then started homeward.

It was a friendly enough parting, but it might have been different had they know how many years were to come and go before they met again.



VIII

A WORKER OF MIRACLES

SOMETHING of a liar was Cyrus, in emergencies, but he told the truth when he said "lots of things have been done that never were done before; and mighty surprisin' things, too!"

History bears him out. The stories of Grimm and Andersen are commonplace events besides the victories of Science. Interesting, indeed, would be the views of Galileo on wireless telegraphy, or Botticelli's opinion of the "movies," or even what language the British commander might have used at Bunker Hill had the Yankees employed aeroplanes. Since the impossible is now in daily use, the dream of the visionary in every home, incredible things have ceased to astonish. Fairy tales are coming true.

So thought Dr. Alton, on the afternoon following that last interview between Ruth and Cyrus, when he was suddenly converted from incredulity to compul-

sory faith in an achievement which he had believed impossible. As he drove up to his own house Cyrus leaned out of the sitting room window and told him to go at once to Mrs. Heywood who had fallen on the stairs and broken a leg. Dr. Alton asked no questions, turned about and drove off. A few hundred yards along the road he met Mr. Heywood, who, much agitated, and traveling fast, as if trying to walk and run at the same time. The doctor stopped and the clergyman climbed in. As they started off Mr. Heywood exclaimed, out of breath: "How fortunate this is. I was afraid you might not be at home. Poor Alice, I fear, has broken her leg."

"Yes, so I heard. I am on my way there."

"On your way to my house?"

"Of course."

Mr. Heywood turned in surprise. "You say you—you knew of the accident?"

"Yes."

"But, Doctor, you couldn't. It happened less than ten minutes ago."

"Cyrus told me. Perhaps somebody telephoned him."

"But I have no telephone."

Dr. Alton smiled. "Possibly somebody is a faster runner than you."

"But no one was there except Alice, Ruth and myself."

"Ruth may have done it."

"Ruth has not left her mother. She is there now. And nobody else knows of it."

For a moment Dr. Alton was silent. "Bad news travels fast, Mr. Heywood."

"But not when there's nobody to carry it."

"Yes, there's that miraculous new messenger boy, wireless telegraphy."

Mr. Heywood was in no mood for argument and said no more as Dr. Alton obviously had little faith in any mysterious messenger. So, for the moment, the subject was dropped.

When the bone was set—and it proved a simple fracture—Mr. Heywood followed Dr. Alton to the door. I wish, Doctor, you would ask Cyrus how he got his information—just to gratify my curiosity."

"Are you absolutely sure that Ruth did not tell him?"

Mr. Heywood, for answer, stepped back into the hall and called to his daughter, who at once came running down the stairs.

"Ruth," he said, "do you know how Cyrus heard of your mother's accident so soon after it happened?"

"Yes, sir. I told him."

"You!" exclaimed her father. "Why Ruth, you never left the house!"

"And Cyrus," said Dr. Alton, "is at home, confined to the house with a bad cold. At least that's where he ought to be."

"Oh, sir, he is!" said Ruth. "He sent me a note asking me to talk to him, on the porch, from our house

at just five o'clock, and I did. Mother fell on the stairs just as I began to talk so I told him about it."

"Do you mean," said her father, "that your voice carried from this house to his, nearly a mile away?"

"Oh, no, sir! Cyrus doesn't have to hear your voice, always. He has a special way of knowing things."

"A special way of knowing things?"

Ruth nodded.

"What do you mean, Ruth? What things?"

"Things you don't say."

"But you did say to him that your mother had an accident."

"Yes, sir; but he didn't have to hear it. He gets it some other way." She added, with a smile: "He doesn't get it through his ears."

"Then how does he get it?"

"I don't know. He says it is in the air. He says he thinks it's a kind of wireless telegraph and must work the same way."

"Most extraordinary!" murmured Mr. Heywood, and he looked at Dr. Alton as if hoping for more light on a cloudy subject. Dr. Alton, however, was gazing thoughtfully at the girl, whom he knew to be truthful. He also knew the misleading possibility of a child's imagination. "Do you really think, Ruth, that Cyrus

"I don't know, sir. I couldn't hear anything from learned of the accident in that way?"

him."

"You mean if he answered back you couldn't get it?"

"Yes, sir. Nobody but Cyrus could understand anything at all, so far away."

"He knew that you couldn't hear anything *he* said?"

"Yes, sir. He just wanted to find out if he could tell what a person said so far away without hearing it."

Mr. Heywood turned to Dr. Alton. "He evidently succeeded, and it seems quite incredible."

Dr. Alton did not reply, directly. He had closed his eyes, and his own thoughts, whatever their nature, were so absorbing that Mr. Heywood's voice had failed to reach him. His abstraction, however, was brief. With a smile he shook hands with Ruth. "I thank you for your testimony, little lady. You make a perfect witness." Then to her father: "I shall interview Cyrus at once and we will try to reach a better understanding of the mystery."

He promised to call in the morning to see Mrs. Heywood, and then departed.

When he entered his own house, half an hour later, he found the worker of miracles asleep on a sofa near the open fire. Curled up at his feet lay Zac. But Zac was not asleep. When the doctor moved toward the fire and stood before it, warming his hands, Zac followed him with his eyes. These cautioning eyes were saying: "Don't make a noise or you'll wake him."

Dr. Alton understood. He made no noise. But as he looked down upon the sleeper he saw signs of vivid dreams. The sleeper kicked, muttered and moved his

hands. One vigorous kick landed on Zac's forehead, but the recipient merely closed his eyes, hoping for better luck another time. One more kick, spasmodic and violent, just missing Zac's head by an eighth of an inch, and the boy awoke. As he awoke he sat up and shouted:

"She's out!"

Seeing his father he swung his legs over the side of the sofa, blinked and laughed aloud. Zac also laughed:—that is, he barked. He always barked when Cyrus laughed, just to be in it. To do whatever Cyrus did was, of course, beyond a dog's ambition, but laughter being a manifestation of his owner's joy, he expressed himself with sincerity and enthusiasm by tail and voice. Moreover, by always joining Cyrus in his mirth the world might know that their tastes were similar. In fact, to be identified with Cyrus in any way was glory enough for any dog. Cyrus was really the Only Boy. There were, of course, other boys, but they could not all be Cyruses. God was not running this world on any such plan. There was always one specimen that overtopped the others. Only one Helen of Troy, one Socrates, one Columbus, one George Washington and one Cyrus. Zac was not familiar with these names but they serve their humble purpose in fixing the status of the human being that he loved and respected above all others.

"That's the funniest thing that ever was," said Cyrus. "What do you think I dreamed? I dreamed we were playing ball on the ice on Minnebuc Lake; us

fellers against the women, and we all had skates on. I was pitchin'. Mrs. Snell was at the bat and Deacon Whitlock first base. Mrs. Snell's kind of fat, you know, and fierce and dignified, but she wore trousers like the rest of us. Oh, it was funny!"

Here the miracle worker paused and wagged his head, indicating suppressed mirth. "Well, I gave her a twister. Jimminy! Wouldn't I like to give such balls in a real game! 'Twas an up and down curve and a fade away all in one. It went like a cork screw. No feller would ever try to hit it. But Mrs. Snell did! She just shut her eyes and let go—and she hit it! I caught it and threw to first. It turned into a snow-ball between me and Deacon Whitlock and hit him square in his wide open mouth—for he's always talking to himself, you know."

"Yes, I know."

"Well, Mrs. Snell dropped her bat and went sliding down to first—on her skates—and when she got there she couldn't stop. She just scooped up Deacon Whitlock as if he'd been a little boy and carried him off in her arms. He was screamin' and kickin' and wavin' his arms like a mad baby. And Luther, who was out in right field, grabbed her by the trousers and tried to hold her back. Oh, it was funny!"

Again the worker of miracles was convulsed with mirth.

Dr. Alton nodded, smiled and expressed a proper appreciation of the unusual game. He looked down into the boy's laughing face, as he spoke, and there

came to him an impression, considered trivial at the moment, but remembered later with a livelier interest. It seemed to him, for a brief moment, that Cyrus's smiling eyes were gazing deep into his own as if groping, in a friendly way, for unspoken thoughts. Dr. Alton realized that this impression was probably due to his recent discovery of the boy's extraordinary faculty—a usual look in Cyrus's eyes which, earlier in the day, would have made no impression. But the look was short, little more than a glance, and Cyrus lowered his eyes to his swinging legs and pulled up a stocking which was slipping down.

"This afternoon," he said, "I broke a pane of glass in the parlor."

"How did that happen?"

"Well," said Cyrus, still watching his swinging legs, "I was playing barn-tick in the parlor with Zac. I would throw the ball against the wall and catch it when it bounced back, and every two or three throws I'd let Zac get it. Then once, I threw it kind of careless——"

"Carelessly, you mean."

"Yes, sir, kind of carelessly and it hit the window instead of the wall."

Dr. Alton slowly moved his head in acknowledgment of the explanation. The other subject on which he desired light was so much more important than any broken window pane that neither his face nor manner expressed very serious disapproval. In fact, Cyrus

had hardly finished his confession before his father spoke.

"How did you happen to know, this afternoon, that Mrs. Heywood had broken her leg?"

"Oh, that was a great idea! I've invented a new kind of wireless!" And he went on to tell, but in different words, the same story that Ruth had given. "And just think! if everybody can do it there won't be any need of telegraph machines, or letters either. People can talk miles apart—just talk, as Ruth and I did!"

"Yes, of course, but how long ago did you find you could do this?"

"Only to-day. This was the first time."

"But Ruth says you often know what people think, or are going to say, before they say it?"

"Yes, sir."

"How long have you been able to do this?"

"Oh, p'r'aps three or four years."

"Why did you never happen to tell me?"

"I supposed you knew. I supposed everybody could do it."

"No; it's a very unusual faculty—very unusual indeed." Then, with a smile: "I suppose you have often known what *I* was thinking?"

Cyrus laughed. "Oh, yes; lots of times!"

"When was the last time?"

Cyrus hesitated. He looked down at Zac, as if for encouragement. Then, with a glance from the corners of his eyes: "Just now."

"Just now!"

Cyrus bobbed his head and grinned. "Yes, just now."

"Why—what was it?"

Again Cyrus hesitated. His father smiled—the smile of reassurance. "Go ahead and tell me about it."

"Will you promise not to be angry or say anything bad?"

"Yes, I promise."

"Well, when I broke the window pane in the parlor to-day I was going to wait and let Joanna tell you about it when I was out of the way. But when you looked at me to-night after I had told about the dream I saw that you were in such a hurry to find out about the message from Ruth, that you wouldn't think so much of the window pane. So I told you."

Dr. Alton smiled and kept his promise, refraining from criticism. But he recalled the look in the boy's eyes, a few moments since—the look as of gently exploring another's thoughts. The recollection at this present moment brought a singular feeling almost of awe; as of something beyond human limitations. Was he on the border land of the supernatural? And yet, as he looked into the honest face of Cyrus, his wonder did not lessen. He found, therein, no solution of the mystery. He discovered nothing beyond the familiar face of his normal, sane and healthy boy, absorbed in things that became his age. He knew that Cyrus, like other boys, would rather eat than pray; that he preferred stealing apples to hearing sermons and would

rather be a pirate than a bishop. This knowledge did not trouble the father. He had been a boy himself.

Then, sitting on the old sofa beside Zac and Cyrus, he asked many questions. They were all answered. Cyrus had nothing to conceal. With boyish frankness he told many things, some serious, some amusing—little secrets of his own—when he had enjoyed his extraordinary gift. His experiences in divining the thoughts of others were given as matter of fact occurrences. He had believed, until now, that this power was possessed by all the world.

It was a cozy group on the old sofa before the open wood fire, Zac, Cyrus and Dr. Alton, and they stayed an hour or more. Dr. Alton began to realize that this faculty was not only mind reading but something far beyond. That thoughts of others should come to this boy with no effort of his own was almost incredible. Even more amazing was the transmission through space not only of spoken words but of the unuttered wishes of far away friends. Was his son the master of a vital secret, a mysterious power now unknown to science but, in future years perhaps, to be common knowledge? Was it within the realms of material science? Or was it an individual form of spiritual sympathy, some ethereal harmony attuned by superhuman guidance to a chosen few?

When Cyrus had gone upstairs to bed Dr. Alton sat long before the open fire, remembering. And there was much to remember. At last he stepped out into the night air and stood upon the door-step. Before

him, in the moon-light, were snow-covered fields, tall skeletons of elms and maples, their leafless branches like barren memories against the sky. But this New England landscape was not what he saw. He saw, through his closed eyelids, the blue waters of the Adriatic. Close beside him a pair of loving eyes, dark, tragic—but smiling now—were looking deep into his own and the woman's lips were asking if it were possible for the unborn child to inherit its mother's power of divining another's thoughts. And he—the wise young doctor!—shook his head and smiled at the foolish question.

And, lo! not only had the power descended to the boy but with it had come an added faculty even more mysterious and unbelievable!



IX

DREAMS?

IT was the very next morning that Ruth's father, the Rev. George Bentley Heywood, received an urgent appeal from China to fill a vacancy in the missionary field. Ten days after receiving the message he, his wife and tearful daughter, were on a train for San Francisco.

The days that followed were solemn days for Cyrus. And it so happened that the next ten years were solemn years for Longfields. A new railroad carried through a neighboring town left the village stranded. The young men began to leave. When a house burned there was no rebuilding. The tottering sheds behind the weed-grown cellar of the Baptist Church were typical of the town's decay. It was significant that when

Philetus Bisbee died—house and carriage painter—his business had so shrunk that no one took his place. The burning of the inn meant that Longfields as a resting place for travelers was to be forgotten.

People died in Longfields, but few were born. Pupils at the little red school house dwindled to about a dozen. The teacher's pay was so small that to accept the position became an act of charity to the village.

When Judge David Lincoln moved away he expressed sincere regret: "I am sorry to go, but lawyers cannot thrive on memories alone."

Wits of neighboring towns referred to the sleeping village as Pompeii, Old Has Been and Long Memories. The main street with its overhanging elms was always silent. And the common, once noisy with excited children, was solemn in its stillness. Every day seemed Sunday.

In short, Longfields went the way of many other New England villages. It became a restful and picturesque reminder of better days. But, after all, it was merely following, in its decay, the example of famous queens of fashion, Troy, Babylon and Thebes.

This gentle retirement to oblivion affected Cyrus less than his father. For Dr. Alton sent him away to school, to prepare for college, and the absent boy almost forgot the tragedies of his home. Moreover, Cyrus found much excitement in his new surroundings; much to learn—and unlearn—from contact with so many others of his age. They came from town and country and from almost every state. What he

got from books was least in interest and often the least in value. That million-sided problem, Human Nature, was, as usual, the hardest to understand, the last to be solved.

Rarely does a boy with Anglo Saxon blood in his veins find it necessary to cure himself of too much polish. But even in this case Old Human Nature was triumphant. When away from Longfields Cyrus found his ceremonious courtesy was misapplied, misunderstood and almost a misdemeanor. His eighteenth century bows were regarded by his chambermaid as ironical; by his classmates as a silly affectation, and were resented by his instructors as efforts to be funny at their expense.

Further discouragement came one day in the friendly warning of an older boy. "You know, Drowsy, or you don't know, that those salaams of yours give the impression that before you came to this academy you were the colored porter on a parlor car."

The result was that before the end of the first term his manners were only a trifle better than those of other boys. Except, of course, when taken off his guard, as in his interview with the wife of a certain prosperous citizen who slipped and fell in coming out of the post office. She was a sensitive lady, irascible and of massive proportions. As she landed on the sidewalk, two snow white stockings with stalwart limbs inside waved briefly before the public eye. They resembled the whitened limbs of a billiard table. Let-

ters fell from one of her hands. With the other she clung convulsively to a large umbrella. Three girls involuntarily laughed aloud.

As the lady climbed to her feet two light blue eyes shot fury from a purple face. When Cyrus stepped forward to gather up the scattered letters he forgot all his recent training, raised his cap, moved it gracefully in the air and bent low and reverentially—as the First Lord of the Bed Chamber might salute his Sovereign. But the boiling lady identified this seeming mockery with the laughter of the maidens. She brought the fat umbrella hard down upon the head of Cyrus, and she struck with all her might. Luckily for the recipient her hand was quivering with rage, and no physical damage was accomplished. But the damage to his pride was serious. As he straightened up and looked the lady in the face his cheeks were hot. The erstwhile drowsy eye showed astonishment—and anger. His cherubic lips had parted: “Then pick ’em up yourself, you stupid old——”

At that instant he recalled an injunction of his father. “Whatever may happen, Cyrus, always be a gentleman.” He had not been told just how a gentleman should behave when beaten on the head with an umbrella—and in public. But he closed his lips without even beginning the sentence. He bowed again, and this bow was even more elaborate than the first.

“I beg your pardon, madam.”

Then he turned, put on his cap and walked away.

Again was heard the giggle of the girls. That a person should apologize for being hit on the head with an umbrella was too funny for silence.

Meanwhile, the cost of all this experience and of his pursuit of knowledge fell heaviest on his father. The practical obliteration of his native town and field of work meant financial embarrassment for Dr. Alton. The few remaining inhabitants of the village were now too poor to pay a doctor. To fit Cyrus for college, and keep him there, Dr. Alton exhausted the small capital left him by his father. When that was gone he tried to sell his orchard and the best portions of the farm. But no purchasers appeared. He did sell, however, to a dealer in Boston, some family heirlooms; rare pieces of Colonial furniture and all his Canton china.

To Cyrus, meanwhile, Fate was paying especial attention—with more to come. During his last year in college a surprising change took place in his ways of spending time—surprising, but familiar to biographers. Such transformations, where indifference suddenly changes to ambition, indolence to industry, and where the trifler becomes in earnest, have frequently occurred, as with Julius Cæsar, St. Paul, Henry V of England, William Shakespeare, Mirabeau and many other notables. So there was nothing original in this sudden awakening of Cyrus. During the first three years of his college course he was a “good fellow.” When classmates entered his room with “Come along, Drows, old man; chuck the books, and now for the

real life," he joyfully obeyed and took chances on recitations: with the usual result that only distant relations were maintained with the upper end of his class. It was the price of popularity and of the joy of living. Toward the end of his last year, however, his more festive companions were horrified by an unexpected miracle. A little book came into his hands. It threw a dazzling light on the possibilities of electricity. It aroused his curiosity and so kindled his imagination that he turned his back on the "real life" and became studious. This sudden thirst for knowledge caused a shock to his festive pals. They were anxious about him. For, indeed, is there not cause for alarm, when a Bully Boy, a Rattling Good Sport and a Live One suddenly loses his grip on "real life" and becomes a Bookworm, a High Brow and a Dead One?

But Cyrus did not weaken. He clung to his new love. Unavailing were such arguments as "Chuck the science, Drowsy. There's time enough for wisdom when you are old!" or, "Don't be a chump, Drows. You can't be young forever. Remember, Youth is short and Science long."

And he felt neither shame nor repentance when his own chum rebuked him. "Drows, old man, you are just a crank. Harvard Students are not giving points to old sharps in science. For God's sake don't be a freak and get musty before your time."

But words were wasted. This new ambition had brought to him a revelation of his real self. He had no suspicion, at the time, that the reading of this little

book was to lead to adventures surpassing the wonder tales of his childhood. To his brain came a dazzling light. He began to realize the infinite possibilities of man's power, with the hidden forces of the universe once in his control. A fantastic dream, perhaps, but the more he thought the deeper grew his conviction. He knew—or thought he knew—that he had it in him to open wider the door that hides the secrets of the air. Greater still would have been his confidence had he known that a part of his inheritance was the courage and the genius of the famous Italian scientist who wrote the book. And it appeared from the little portrait of the author that he, too, had slumbrous eyes. It was ordained, however, that their relationship was to remain hidden both from the great discoverer and from his yet more daring grandson.

At the end of the four years at Harvard, Dr. Alton's finances were low, indeed. But Cyrus argued for a course in Chemistry and Physics at the Institute of Technology in Boston. He took the course, and it was clearly understood that it meant bitter economies for both father and son. But the economies were calmly faced. Some of them meant serious sacrifice in personal comfort, not only in the little luxuries of life, but in clothing, food and fuel. Of blows to pride they made no account.

At last Cyrus finished his course at the "Teck." His return to Longfields was on a smiling afternoon in May and he found his father at home, sitting on the porch with Luther Dean. Cyrus and his boyhood

friend had seen little of each other during the last six years. Luther had grown into a rather handsome young man. Otherwise Fortune had not favored him. With many other American boys, his ambition was to become a millionaire, and to be quick about it. And with many other boys in this upsetting country, he looked down, in fancy, from the glittering peaks of sudden wealth, upon the patient plodders in the valley below. Not for him the goody mottoes of the Sunday School. Not for him a wasted youth in "starting at the bottom, working your way up" with "slow but sure," and all the other maxims for smothering talent. For him the Napoleonic grasp of opportunity, the cutting of the Gordian knot. He believed in quick achievement. He believed

"There is a tide in the affairs of men
Which taken at the flood, leads on to fortune."

And he believed in short cuts. His models for success were the millionaires "who had struck it rich." And he was firm in the faith that his revolt from "Patient Industry," "Honest Toil" and similar delusions was a sign of genius. In other words, he was the sort of youth no man desires in his employ. For brief periods he had held positions in different establishments in Worcester. Now, again, he was out of a job.

But Luther's manners were good, and his raiment above reproach. At present, as the three men sat on the porch, his spruce attire was in striking contrast with the almost shabby garments of Dr. Alton and

his son. But Dr. Alton happened to be one of those men who have no need of clothing unless for warmth or propriety. In his head and face and figure were lines of strength and beauty that gave distinction. In his bearing and in all his movements there was dignity and a natural grace. Were he dressed as a beggar at a coronation he would have held his own.

As for Cyrus, the last ten years seemed to have made little difference, merely transforming him from boy to man; this change, as wise men have long suspected, being mostly outward. He grew to the usual height, had the usual number of teeth, recited from the usual books, played the usual games, committed the usual follies, absorbed the usual experience from the various victories and defeats of our usual life, still retaining at twenty-one the drowsy eyes and curving lips of his early childhood. Deep within him, however, were aspirations and a strength of purpose that contradicted the languid eyes and boyish mouth.

After the greetings, and when various questions had been asked and answered, Dr. Alton lighted his old briarwood pipe, took a whiff or two and said to his son:

"And the great idea, Cyrus, any further developments?"

"I should say there were! I've got it, father!"

Dr. Alton raised his eyebrows. Really? You don't mean——"

"Yes I do. I mean just that. I have found it.

It's the wonder of wonders. And it works—even better than I hoped."

Dr. Alton straightened up and smiled—a smile of surprise and pleasure.

Cyrus returned the smile. At the same time his drowsy eyes became less drowsy and in his voice was a mild excitement. "And so simple! Why, I feel like laughing when I think of it. The only wonder is that hundreds of people have never discovered it."

"What is it?" said Luther.

Cyrus hesitated a moment, as if to be sure of his words. "It's a simple and inexpensive device for concentrating in a space about the size of your two hands any quantity of electrical force."

"When you say any quantity, do you mean enough to run a typewriter—or an automobile?"

"I mean enough to run a railroad train or an ocean steamer; or to lift this house—or any other building."

Luther smiled the smile of doubt. "And the thing is no bigger than your two hands?"

"It resembles two metal soup plates back to back."

Luther whistled—a short whistle signifying a deficiency of belief. "That sounds kind of—kind of—as if somebody had wheels in his head. How does the miracle get its power?"

"From the atmosphere around it."

"With no dynamo, nor motor, nor transformer?"

"All that is between the metal dinner plates. Why manufacture power when the whole universe is vi-

brating with it? It is like manufacturing air to breathe."

Luther leaned forward, excitement in his face. "Why it doesn't seem possible. And you have really done it, Drowsy?"

Cyrus nodded.

"But it will revolutionize everything!"

"Yes—it will."

"Is it some new form of electricity you discovered?"

"No, merely a new way of applying our old knowledge. You see, it has been known for some time that air is energy. Dancing about us, in the atmosphere, is plenty of power waiting to be harnessed; power enough to toss mountains into space if we could only direct it. You may have read about the tremendous force in the vibrations of atoms."

"No; not a word.

"Well, every atom is a center of energy. And every atom is composed of millions of electrons. Do you happen to be interested in electro kinetics?"

"Don't even know what it means."

"It relates to the properties of electric currents. My discovery is merely the concentration and directing of those currents. The apparatus is about the size of an apple pie, and so simple that I laugh when I think of it."

"But, Drowsy, you can't get so much power in such a little mechanism. That thing could never start a locomotive or an ocean steamship."

"Start it! A dozen of these little things fastened



'COULD LIFT IT IN THE AIR TO ANY HEIGHT, CREW PASSENGERS,
AND CARGO" - Page 155

to an ocean steamer could lift it in the air to any height, crew, passengers and cargo, and drive it at any rate of speed and for any distance. And at no cost."

Luther whistled. "Is Cyrus guying us, Doctor, or is he only dotty?"

Dr. Alton smiled, but gave no answer.

"After you had lifted the steamship up into the air," said Luther, "how soon could you get her across the ocean?"

"That's for the captain to decide. He could do it comfortably in an hour or two—or, in five or ten minutes, if he were really in a hurry."

"Oh, I say, Drowsy, come down to earth again, and join us."

"No, I can't come down when I once get up. But I don't blame you for not believing it, Luther. I only believe it myself when I see it working. It is really easy to understand, though, when you know that electro magnetic waves in the ether are cavorting through space at the rate of about a hundred and eighty-six thousand miles a second, forced by our friends the electrons. There's no reason why my device should not go at about the same rate. That would take our passengers and cargo across the ocean in considerably less than one minute."

Dr. Alton shook his head. "No, Cyrus, that's too sudden even for a Yankee."

Luther assumed an expression of alarm. "Do you think Cyrus will get over this, Doctor? Is he wild

on other subjects, or is it only one screw that's loose?"

Cyrus laughed and turned toward his father. "What an awful joke if Luther should be right! I could easily believe it a crazy dream if one or two scientists had not already prophesied it. The thing was sure to come. And now that it's here it seems too simple to be true. I merely happen to be the first man to stumble on it."

"Just what is it?" said Luther. "How do you do it? What's the process?"

For an instant their eyes met. To Luther came an odd sensation he had known as a boy—that the tranquil gaze of Cyrus was reading his secret thoughts. As his thoughts at that moment were not for publication the sensation was disturbing. To hide his embarrassment he turned away toward Dr. Alton, and made a joking remark about trips to Europe, over and back, on Saturday afternoon. "It even beats wireless," he said.

"Well, rather!" said Cyrus. "Wireless will soon be a back number."

Again Luther whistled. "Wireless a back number! Well, that's certainly going some!"

But Dr. Alton showed little surprise, merely regarding his son more attentively. "What is to take its place, Cyrus?"

"Just the spoken word. Its transmission through the ether with no mechanical appliance for sending or for receiving."

Luther smiled. "It will have to be a pretty loud voice."

"No louder than wireless. It will be carried by the same forces that carry the wireless message, only more simply applied. The air about us is alive with electric force that is perfectly willing to take our messages without the machinery."

Dr. Alton smiled. "Well, you seem to have confidence in it. That's a good beginning, anyway."

Cyrus also smiled. "I have already done it."

"Already done it?"

"Yes, sir; and more than once. Billy Saunders and I went out into the country, stood nearly a mile apart, spoke in ordinary tones and each heard more than half the other said."

"With no instruments whatever?"

"None except a little receiver about the size of your watch."

Luther whistled again. On his face was a look of surprise—the Surprise that's the brother of Doubt.

Dr. Alton was looking earnestly at his son. Is that really true, Cyrus? Are you absolutely sure no previous knowledge of each other's intentions may have helped a little?"

Then Cyrus explained the experiments in detail. He told how they purposely chose subjects unknown to each other; how they put on paper the words as they arrived; that the percentage of messages correctly received increased at every trial; and that weather conditions, wind, rain or sunshine seemed to

make little difference in the results. After answering other questions, he said to his father :

"But that is only the beginning. The day is coming when even the spoken word will be superfluous."

"Just what do you mean, Cyrus?"

"I mean communicating thought by electric induction—by direct vibrations."

"Say, Cyrus!" exclaimed Luther, "the Arabian Nights isn't in it with you!"

"No, it isn't," said Cyrus. For I have already done it."

"Done what?"

"Sent thought waves—and received them."

"Oh, come off."

But Dr. Alton was looking earnestly at his son. He recalled one or two occasions when Cyrus had accomplished this very thing. And now, as they looked into each other's eyes, he suspected his own thoughts, at this very moment, were being read. His suspicions were correct, for Cyrus answered an unspoken question.

"Yes, sir, it's the same as those you are recalling. But now I understand it. Much depends, of course, on the individual. Latent faculties in individuals, however, can be surprisingly developed. I do believe that within a few years our thoughts, spoken and unspoken, will be traveling through the air as wireless travels now."

Dr. Alton made no reply. He closed his eyes for a time and smoked in silence. His thoughts went back

to those unexplained episodes when Cyrus was a boy; then further back to the villa by the Adriatic. He was recalling a conversation in the loggia of that hidden villa when Luther rose to his feet and exclaimed:

"Is there anything, Cyrus, too impossible for you to believe?"

"Nothing—if it is interesting. I never reject a good fairy tale. Why be a skeptic? To look at a skeptic's face is enough. His digestion is never good. He thinks with his stomach and his stomach reacts on his brain. That means farewell to enthusiasm and to all the best things of life. Ambition and gastric juice are partners. Had Buddha, Christ or Mohammed been skeptics you never would have heard of them. No skeptic could possibly succeed as an inventor, poet, explorer, patriot, or as any other kind of hero. He fails before he begins."

Cyrus paused for a moment, then added: "Perhaps you are both saying to yourselves, better be a skeptic than a credulous ass. But that's open to argument. The credulous ass is not only happier but he has Hope for a backer, and he is a heap sight more likely to get somewhere than the pessimist. The pessimist never starts."

His father nodded approval.

Luther put on his hat. "Right you are, Drowsy. Me for a credulous ass. I swallow all you say, electric miracles and all. Of course, this sending ideas about the world free of expense and without even the trouble of saying them, is quite a morsel for the ordi-

nary throat, but I've got it part way down and am holding on to it. If what you say is true, miracles are with us. Jimminy! It's a large idea!"

"No miracle at all," said Cyrus. "Not half so miraculous as the growth of that apple tree from a seed. And the human brain! Two handfuls of gray matter—and what it achieves! Did you ever happen to realize what a self-starting, Johnny-on-the-Spot, up-to-date miracle your memory is?"

Luther laughed. "Well, no. Not enough to forget my meals."

"Then do it some time. It's the champion mystery of the world. No man knows how it works. We know it furnishes us with names and places, facts and figures and events without limit, and they come to us instantaneously without waiting to be called. A thousand telegraph clerks with an acre of pigeon holes could not accomplish in an hour what your memory does in a second. It is quicker than greased lightning. It's the miracle of miracles. Why, Luther, these thought waves of mine, compared with it, are so simple and so easy that any normal baby could operate them."

"I guess you are right."

After a few more words, this conversation ended, and Luther departed. But Dr. Alton and Cyrus sat a long time on the little porch talking seriously of the Great Discovery.

But the inventor, later that afternoon, was not too much absorbed in electric wonders to visit a corner at

the end of the garden. There he straightened up a slab that marked a grave. The slab was of wood. He brushed the surface with careful hands and read the letters he himself had carved nine years before.

HERE LIES
Zac ALton He
Was VERY smart
and ALSO
GOOD

These lines Cyrus always read with a smile—not of mirth, but of satisfaction with their truth and justice to his old friend's character. Pleasant indeed were those memories!—lively and bounding memories: of adoration for himself and of unswerving loyalty to the final breath of a short but joyous life.



X

THE FARTHEST TRAVELER

ONE sultry morning about six weeks later, Luther Dean got off a train at Springfield. Along the shady side of the main street he walked. He walked faster than usual. His eyes, his hot, perspiring face and general manner showed suppressed excitement. And why not? Wealth, and without labor, would soon be his.

A few blocks from the station he turned into another street, then, not far from the corner he entered a small shop. On the front window of the shop were these words:

I. KATZ

ELECTRICAL CONTRACTOR

The brevity of his name, as here shown, gave as much pleasure to the proprietor as he had suffered annoyance from his fuller and more various name, Isidore Pollacksek Zwillenberg Stcherbatcheff Katz. And even his last little name had proved almost a curse, as his intimates called him "Malty" and "Puss Katz"; also "Tom Katz" and "How Many." But I. Katz, of black eyes and muddy complexion, was an ambitious young man, industrious, surprisingly clever, watchful and polite. He and Luther Dean had one desire in common—an unquenchable thirst for wealth. There was, however, this important difference, that Katz was willing to work for it, while Luther regarded thirst as a substitute for effort.

When Katz's mother, Rosa Hlawatsch, married Emanuel Katz she had a prosperous brother-in-law, Schweers Hjort, who lent the bridal pair enough money to start for America. Two years after Isidore's birth his parents died. Then Mr. and Mrs. Zoob Pschenitza adopted the orphan and cared for him until his nineteenth year, when he found employment with Mr. Hitzrot Fuss, an electrician. Mr. Hitzrot Fuss was a cousin of the Zoob Pschenitzas.

This July morning when Luther entered his shop I. Katz had been in business for himself about a year. The opening of the door rang a bell that gave warning to the proprietor, at work in a little shop at the rear. Luther walked directly to this little shop. I. Katz laid down his work.

"Ah! Good morning, Dean."

"Same to you, Kittens."

"Haven't seen you for a long time. How are you? What's the news from Longdeado?"

"News enough—this time."

As the two men stood by the work bench, and Katz took a second look at his visitor's face, he said:

"What's the matter? Something on your mind?"

Luther removed his hat and coat and lit a cigarette before answering.

"Well, I should say there was. Have you any objections to being a millionaire?"

"Not especially. Got the cash with you?"

"Not this morning. But I've got the next thing to it."

If Katz felt any excitement at this announcement he concealed it. Perhaps he knew Luther too well. With a smile, and a slight movement of the shoulders, he said:

"Of course it's a dead sure thing."

"It is."

"Well, that's something."

"You know, Katzy, the only sure things in this world are death and taxes."

"Yes. So I've heard."

"Well, compared with this thing of mine, taxes are dreams and death never happens. Listen. I can place in your hands a contrivance hardly bigger than a dinner plate that generates electricity without machinery; that has infinite power; that can drag railway trains of any size at any speed and can drive an ocean

steamer. It weighs about five pounds and costs nothing to run."

Katz slowly moved his head, and frowned.

"It's a bad habit, Luther."

"What's a bad habit?"

"Cocktails in the morning. You are seeing miracles."

Luther protested. Then he explained The Thing in detail. Katz pronounced it impossible.

"Of course it's impossible!" said Luther. "That's why it's so devilish good. It does the impossible all day long and all night, too. Why, Katz, it can do anything you ask it—and with no expense. God Almighty supplies the electricity—all you want and for nothing. Can you beat it?"

The electrician began to show interest.

"But are you pop sure it can do these things? Have you seen it work yourself?"

Then to I. Katz, with the bright eyes and muddy complexion, Luther told of the wonders he had seen with his own eyes—touched with his own hands. He described the two soup plates of metal fastened together, with the mysterious space between—the small chamber which held the Miracle of Science. And its priceless secret to be theirs! To give some idea of the power of these two plates he told Katz what happened to Delos King and his load of hay. Delos King's big load of hay got stuck in the meadow. The wheels had sunk in the mud up to the hubs. Two yokes of oxen tried in vain to stir it. Then Cyrus

Alton, carrying The Thing in his hand went down to the meadow, fastened what Delos King thought were two kitchen plates to the end of the pole, turned the button a fraction of an inch and drew the big load of hay out of the bog and up the hill as if it had been a baby carriage!"

Moreover, Luther described to Katz his own experience with this device. When fastened to his chest with straps, that went over his shoulder and under his arms, he had turned the little button and had been lifted gently from the floor and he floated at will near the roof of the old barn.

"But what flabbergasted the old hard heads more than any other one thing," continued Luther, "was the way Cyrus fixed the weather vane on the Baptist Church. It had been struck by lightning—bent and twisted. It's a tall spire and the deacons were trying to figure the cheapest way of getting up there without a scaffolding, when Cyrus happened along. 'What's it going to cost you?' he asked. 'Twenty-five dollars at least,' they said. 'Give me twenty-five,' said Cyrus, 'and I'll do it before night.' 'It'll take you half a day to get up there either by rope or scaffolding,' they said. 'I can get up there in one minute,' said Cyrus, 'after I once start.' At first they laughed, but they agreed to pay twenty-five dollars. Then Cyrus went home—this was in the forenoon—came back with his two soup plates; also a hammer, a monkey wrench and a few other tools. And right there in front of the crowd, he slung the bag of tools across his shoulders,

strapped on the soup plates, turned a button and rose up in the air like a wingless angel. Gee! I tell you the deacons stared! Their eyes were wider open than their mouths!"

"No wonder!" said Katz. "They had reason to be! And did he fix the vane?"

"Well, rather! It didn't take him an hour."

Luther told of other doings that had startled Longfields; of the metal contrivance over ten feet long that resembled a fat cigar; how Cyrus Alton sat inside and, without apparent machinery, rose up through an opening in the barn and sailed at will, in any direction and to any altitude. In one evening he had sailed over the whole of Massachusetts—and more, too.

Then I. Katz, whose bright black eyes had grown brighter and brighter, asked many questions. All his questions were answered promptly, and so clearly as to leave no doubt that the tale was true.

"But how can you get hold of the miracle?" he asked. "What's your scheme?"

Then the artful Yankee unfolded to the still more artful Asiatic his plan—a plan so simple that even the artful Asiatic began to feel prosperous. Some pleasant morning and very soon, while talking with Cyrus, Luther would buckle on the little machine, as if to sail about the barn. Cyrus would probably consent, as on two previous occasions. Then he, Luther, would turn the button too far, as if by accident, pretend to lose control of the machine, and sail up

through the big skylight of the barn, which was always open in pleasant weather. He would wriggle his elbows as if trying to regain control of The Thing. Once up in the air, above the roof of the barn, he would steer in the direction of a certain pond, two miles away, all the time working his hands and elbows as if trying to get back to earth.

"Are you sure you can do it?" said Katz. "You might really lose control if you didn't keep your head."

Luther smiled. "Oh, I can do it all right! I have no idea of steering for heaven before my time. You see I've already done it, and I guess I did it about as well as Alton himself. It's really as easy as driving a Ford—and lots more fun. Why, Pussy, it's like being a bird!"

Katz nodded. "Yes, it sounds good. But where will you go when you once get up?"

"To the big pond, three miles off. It's always a deserted place—especially forenoons. I shall land in a little cove I know, unstrap the machine and hide it in the woods there. Then I shall wade comfortably into the shallow water and lie down for a minute,—with my clothes on."

I. Katz's eyebrows went up. "I see; I see! Bright idea! The machine carried you into water and you had to swim ashore."

"Even so."

"And you lost the machine, which is somewhere in the mud at the bottom of the pond."

"Yep."

"And you'll hurry back to your friend while still wet, so he'll know that what you say is true!"

"You've got it. And that afternoon I'll bring the invention to your shop."

I. Katz, of the muddy complexion, stroked his Oriental nose and nodded approval. His comprehending eyes lingered for an instant on Luther's face with a look that indicated admiration and a friendly feeling. But the unflattering thoughts it covered were not divined by the New Englander.

It was decreed by incorruptible Fate that Luther's opportunity should come the very next morning.

Cyrus was at work in the barn. Dr. Alton, sitting just outside the door in the shade of the building, was reading a war article in a French journal that some one had sent him from Europe. Luther moved idly about, as if to pass the time. At a moment when he saw Cyrus especially absorbed in his work—inside the big iron cigar—he took up *The Thing* and adjusted the straps about his shoulders.

"I am going to float around the barn," he said, "and see how the roof looks."

"All right," said Cyrus, keeping on with his work and not turning his head.

To avoid all risk of hitting the sides of the skylight—for he must rise with apparently unexpected suddenness—he stepped outside the building. With a smile and a nod he said to Dr. Alton:

"If you never saw a real angel, Doctor, here's your chance."

As he put his fingers to the button Cyrus came running out. "Stop! Hold on Luther! Let go! That's not adjusted!"

But Luther was not to be thwarted at the high tide of victory—with riches within reach. He put his fingers to the button and said, with a smile:

"Oh, I know how it——"

The sentence was never finished. He had given the slightest turn, having a sensible fear of the unknown force within. In his haste he must have turned it a fraction more than he intended. For then happened the unprecedented thing—the thing without parallel in human life; so awful, so solemn, so unearthly, that the two men who saw it stood dumb in horror.

As he was speaking, with the smile on his lips, he was lifted from the earth by the straps beneath his arms with a violence that stopped his speech—and his breathing. Up he shot, more like a cannon ball than a rocket. So fast he went, gaining speed with every second, growing smaller and fainter to the two spectators, until—and it all happened in the shortest minute—he disappeared, a tiny speck in the blue sky above.

He had no chance to change his speed.

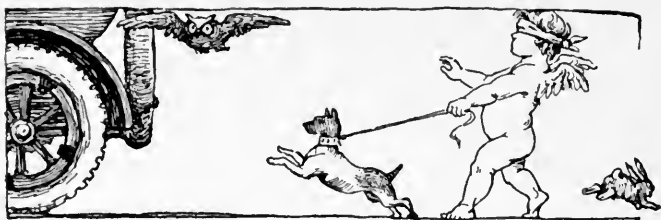
His straw hat, with its crimson band,—like a frivolous friend too light of heart for sudden tragedy—came tumbling earthward, then floated off to the west in playful, easy spirals. A gay farewell to a lifeless body. For death had been instantaneous.



"— AND GLIDE FOREVER, A HOMELESS VAGRANT THROUGH
THE DUSKY VOID" *Page 171*

Dr. Alton and Cyrus stood looking upward—at the spot in the heavens where Luther had disappeared from earthly vision. It was hard to believe what their eyes had seen. And when, in silent horror, they looked into each other's faces, both knew that this sudden traveler had started on a darker and a longer voyage than any previous explorer; that he was moving at a speed unknown to other mortals, and that his journey would never end. Both knew that within the hour he would be beyond the orbit of the earth; that the power propelling him felt no exhaustion. Unless colliding with other celestial derelicts, or drawn into the path of some distant planet—Neptune or Uranus—he would push further out into the Infinite. Then, would he join some starry host, off toward the Milky Way, the Southern Cross or Orion's Belt, and glide forever, a homeless vagrant through the dusky void?

His youthful features, untouched by decaying moisture in the icy gloom, might remain, through the countless ages as his friends last saw him, long after his native earth—like its own moon—had become a lifeless ball. Or, beyond the visible stars, far out into bottomless Space,—too far ever to return—is he to wander through the uncharted regions of yet remoter worlds?



XI

UNSIGHT UNSEEN

AFTER midnight, Uncle George, and miles from anywhere, so do please hurry."

These were parting words to an uncle as he started back to the nearest house—perhaps a quarter of a mile away—to get gasoline for his motor.

Alone in the car, the waiting woman began to realize the extraordinary darkness that enveloped her. Along the road, in front, the two head lights sent their beams of light. But elsewhere, on either side, behind her and above, the black air seemed almost threatening in its silence. So solemn was this silence that she began to imagine herself the only living creature in England. Her own home was in another country, and the invisible scenery on either side was all a mystery. It might be open fields or densest forest—or both. But the damp air that came slowly against her face seemed laden with odors of yet darker places, of deep ravines or sunless caves.

Was this hideous gloom a regular habit with English nights? Being in a foreign land this darkness was, perhaps, more terrifying than darkness in a more familiar country. In the heavens above were no signs of light, either of light that had been or of light to come. And it seemed, in this tomb-like silence, as if the very universe were dead: as if she had drifted into space—the infinite space of her astronomy. From this sable silence she sought relief in watching a portion of the road that lay before her, now illumined by the two lanterns of the car. These beams of light seemed a cheerful, human bond between life and death.

From the gloom, on her right, came the hopeless hoot of an owl. It seemed a voice from the sepulcher—a summons to despair.

A hundred feet, or more, in front of her, where the farthest rays of this light began to lose themselves and mingle with the darkness, she saw a rabbit jump into the road, and speed across it. She wondered what had frightened him. Also, she was inclined to blame him for not being safe at home with his family instead of roaming about the world on such an evil night. To a woman yearning for a sign of life 'twas a welcome sight; but this rabbit, although a thing of life, was as noiseless and unreal as the ghostly world about him. With his half dozen silent leaps through the bar of light he seemed a phantom creature, "of such stuff as dreams are made of."

From his nervous haste she judged that he was

frightened. It was possible, of course, that he was a fearless rabbit and merely taking exercise for his health. But this theory was not accepted, and she watched with interest to see what sort of a pursuer, if any, might appear. Being in that state of mind when almost any imaginings might come true, she would not have been surprised had the pursuer been a real phantom.

But these speculations became less trifling, of a sudden, and were transferred to quite a more serious object. From the same place, in the same ghostly manner, but more slowly than his predecessor, stepped the figure of a man. Shading his eyes with a hand, he stood for a moment in the stream of light as if taking his bearings, or dazed by the glare of the lanterns. Then he scraped, with his foot, a line in the road at right angles to it, piling up a little mound of earth. The witness, in the car, supposed he was marking for future guidance the spot at which he entered from the blacker world. At last, and always with a hand before his eyes, he came toward the blinding headlights. The invisible spectator had straightened up and her dreaming eyes had opened wider. For the figure was a strange one. On its head was a curious cap, which seemed to be of leather. There were pieces at the ears standing up like wings, as on some ancient helmets she had seen in pictures. The rest of his attire also resembled leather, with high leggings reaching above his knees. Around his waist a wide metallic band, something wider and more important than a

simple belt, glistened as he moved. The girl, in alarm, stood up, looked back and listened for the absent uncle. She heard nothing, and could see nothing. She sat down again, and waited.

The man, of medium height and slender figure, appeared to move unsteadily, as if weak, or dizzy. He walked slowly, and stopped, once or twice, as if to balance himself on unreliable legs. The unseen spectator thought he might be ill, or injured in some way. When, at last, he passed from the glare of the headlights and came into the darkness, beside the car, she could discern him, dimly—or rather felt his presence—as he stood there. And she knew that he was trying, and probably in vain, to form some idea of the seated figure before him. At last he spoke.

“Can you tell me, sir, where this is; what place?”

With these words the girl's fears departed. For, not only were they uttered in a gentle, well modulated tone, but the voice itself had a pleasing quality.

“I don't know, sir. But my uncle will be here in a moment. He can tell you.”

She could see that he took a step backward, and stood further away.

“I beg your pardon, madam. One can't see much in this light. Could you tell me what—er—what state this is?”

“What state?”

“Yes—if you please.”

This was a yet harder question. Did he mean some administrative division of the country which she had

never learned. Being unfamiliar with English political geography, she answered simply.

"I don't know."

This time it was the questioner who was surprised. But, even more gently than before, he inquired:

"You don't know what state we are in?"

"No, sir."

There was a short silence.

"Could you tell me," he inquired, always deferentially, "the name of the nearest town?"

"Droitwich. I think we are in it now."

"Droitwich?"

"Yes, Droitwich."

He repeated the name as if hearing it for the first time.

"It must be a small place," he said.

"I think it is."

"What is the nearest town of importance;—the nearest city?"

"Worcester."

"Oh, Worcester! Thank you. I know Worcester. But I never heard of that other place,—this place,—Droitwich. How far are we from Worcester?"

"About six miles, I think—six or seven."

"Oh, really!" He seemed relieved. There was happy surprise in his tone. "Thank you. I am very much obliged. Good night."

He walked away, out into the stream of light. Slowly he walked, carefully and with uncertain steps.

A few yards away, however, he stopped, hesitated, then turned, came back and again stood beside her.

"I beg your pardon for being so persistent, but may I ask you one more question, even more foolish than the others? This city of Worcester is in the State of Massachusetts, is it not?"

"In the state of Massachusetts?"

"Yes—that Worcester is the one you mean, is it not?"

Now if this conversation had occurred in the United States the girl might have answered wisely, for she was more familiar with that country and knew something of its geography. But when such wide-of-the-mark questions were propounded in the heart of England they brought bewilderment. Moreover, they indicated an unbelievable ignorance or a wandering mind—or impertinence.

Her frown, although invisible in the darkness, seemed to reach the traveler.

"I beg your pardon, but I really have no idea where I am. Would you mind just telling me what part of the country we are in? Are we in Massachusetts?"

His manner was earnest. The sincerity of his tone again inspired confidence—and awakened her sympathy. "I don't quite know how to tell you, but we are very far from Massachusetts."

"Then what state is this?"

"I don't know just what you mean by state. The only state of Massachusetts I ever heard of is in America."

"Isn't this America?"

This question so far transcended, in foolishness, all its predecessors that her fears returned. She made no reply. What traveler, in his senses, could be so far astray? Was he a wandering lunatic escaped from his keepers, preferring darkness to light? Or was he merely amusing himself at her expense? As she recalled the lateness of the hour, and his strange appearance on the scene, her fears once more returned. Her impulse was to stand up, turn about and see if her uncle was in sight. But she dared not stir. Such action might offend him. For lunatics are often sensitive, and easily enraged. The figure in the gloom, however, came no nearer, but remained at a proper distance. When next he spoke it was slowly, and yet more earnestly. And the girl knew from his manner as well as from his words that he suspected the impression he was making.

"I don't blame you, madam, for whatever thoughts you may have. I have traveled so fast and so far that I am really dazed. But if you will kindly tell me where we are, in what country, state, province or territory,—anything—it will be doing me a great service."

In a constrained voice, and in a tone which made it reasonably clear that this conversation was affording her little pleasure, she replied :

"We are near the city of Worcester, in England."

For a moment he stood in silence. Then, with a

certain weariness in his voice, "Thank you. I hope you will pardon my disturbing you."

"Certainly."

Again he moved away.

This man's voice stirred memories. But these memories—of some far-away past—were dim and elusive. Vainly she tried to recall either when or where she had known the voice. Just as he was turning from the bar of light to disappear into the outer gloom, there came to her a gleam of memory from the distant past. Quickly she stood up in the car, her lips parted to call aloud. But she hesitated. A mistake, under present conditions, might prove more than awkward. So she uttered no sound. The stranger, however, as if responding to the unuttered words—to the thought itself—turned about and came toward the car. He walked quickly, but with the same unsteadiness as when he first appeared; and always with a hand before his eyes to shut out the blinding glare of the headlight. When alongside the car, again invisible in the darkness, he said:

"Yes, I am Drowsy. Who calls me?"

She was startled as she realized, in a kind of terror, that the unspoken message must have reached him. However, she answered, simply:

"Ruth Heywood."

With an exclamation of surprise and joy he opened the door, climbed in and seated himself beside her.

"Oh, this is too good!"

In the darkness he groped about and they managed to shake hands.

"Why, Ruth, this is hard to believe!"

It was, indeed! Many questions were asked, and answered. And they talked of earlier days at Longfields, of Longfields people, of what sort of men and women their playmates had become. More than all else, they talked of their old friendship and their various adventures together. And both laughed in recalling how Ruth in that distant period was mother, sister, aunt, governess and best girl to Cyrus. This revival of the old intimacy had reached a stage where the enshrouding darkness was almost forgotten.

"But tell me, Drowsy," she demanded, "how came you here and why did you ask all those crazy questions? I should be sorry to think you had been dining too well."

"Dining too well! No, my wabby course just now was owing, partly, to not having dined at all:—and with neither lunch nor breakfast either."

"You poor thing! Then why pretend you didn't know you were in England?"

"There was no pretending. I really didn't know until you told me."

"Indeed! And where did you think yourself? In Australia?"

"I had no idea. If you had told me I was in Australia I should have believed you. I have been traveling so high above the earth that the upper ether went to my head—and legs."



"— FAR AND FAST, EVEN FOR A BIRD MAN." *Page 151*

"You must have been fast and far, even for a bird man, if you didn't know on which side of the ocean you had landed."

There was a silence:—a silence of doubt and of budding suspicion in the woman's mind.

"Listen, Ruth. I *have* been far and fast, even for a bird man. I will tell you all about it later, if you don't mind. If I told you now, you would think me crazier, if possible, than when I asked those questions. And I shouldn't blame you. My story would seem as fantastic as if I had been around the world in a night, or to another planet. What I have done—where I have been is—is—so impossible that you would be a very credulous person to believe it. But later I will tell you all—everything—please consider me in my right mind."

"In your right mind! Why, Drowsy, you were never in your right mind! So I should believe anything you told me—unless it was something easy or natural, like other people. You were always doing impossible things and thinking impossible thoughts—a most disturbing boy. I remember I always felt responsible for you. You wanted the moon—even then."

"And now, a full-fledged lunatic, I have just come from the moon!"

"I have no doubt you think so. And you were always reaching up to pick a star. Yes, you *were* a trial."

Cyrus laughed. "Will you do me a favor?"

"Depends on what it is."

"Just a little one?"

"Probably not. But what is it?"

"You remember our wedding at the Unitarian Church, away back in that enchanted past?"

"Yes."

"Well, just consider that ceremony binding."

"Now you are getting crazy again."

"No, I was never saner."

"Very likely, but you are crazy now. Why, Drowsy, being only a man, you don't realize how lucky we are that it was not binding!"

"Lucky for you, perhaps," said Cyrus, "but not for me. I am sure you are even more desirable, more beautiful, more generally perfect and irresistible—if possible—than you were then."

"On the contrary. If you could see me by daylight you would shout for joy at your escape."

"No, Ruth, you can't fool me that way. Are you little or big?"

He groped about and laid a hand on her shoulder. "I should say you were little."

She pushed away the hand. "Keep your hands to yourself, Cyrus. You forget we are no longer children."

Cyrus obeyed. "True enough. But we were really married, you know. Surely a husband may touch his wife's shoulder. Tell me, have you the same wonder-working eyes and mouth and haughty bearing? You are not a great big woman, I have discovered that."

"No, I am neither big nor lovely. I am little and

dried up—and wrinkled, like a baked apple—and surprisingly ugly.”

“Dried up at your age? May I touch your face just a little?”

“You may not!”

“Oh, well, it doesn’t matter. There’s charm in baked apples. There’s character in a dried-up face.”

“But that was only the beginning. As I dried and shriveled, my hair fell out.”

“Good! I love a bald head—especially in a woman. There’s no distinction in hair. All animals have it. In that delectable period of sudden marriages, I remember some things clearly, as if yesterday. I recall distinctly the eyes of my bride. No man could forget them. In their fathomless depths even a boy could lose himself. And, oh, so beautiful! One such eye would transform a dried apple face into a thing of joy. And in that bride’s face were two of them. Don’t tell me they, also, are gone.”

“Only one.”

“Too bad! Have you lost any limbs?”

“Not yet.”

“And your teeth are gone?”

“Oh, long, long ago.”

There was a silence. So black was the enveloping darkness that the silence itself seemed heavy, as if forbidding conversation.

At last Cyrus spoke. “So far as I can learn, your face is like a baked apple, your teeth and one eye are

gone, and you have no hair. But I'll take you as you are."

Ruth laughed. "Why, Cyrus! That's practically an offer of marriage! You appear even wilder and more reckless than when you were trying to discover whether you were in England or Massachusetts."

"On the contrary, I am wiser than you think. I was in love with you in Longfields—and I am finding now that neither time nor absence have changed that feeling. What's a tooth, an eye, or a few hairs more or less to an honest lover?"

"Honest humbug! You forget how well I knew you. You had no respect for truth."

"Yes, but only as a child. I am telling the truth now, on my honor. Let's not separate again. Why, it's beginning a new life! Come. Let's go back to the Unitarian Church and be married just once more. Only once more; that's all I ask."

"Indeed I shall not! I am not buying a pig in a poke. When daylight came and I really saw you I might be sick with horror."

"No, no! I'm not so bad as that! In fact I look about as I did when a boy, only—more beautiful."

"Then you are a funny looking man, Drowsy, with your sleepy eyes and your little buttoned-up mouth."

Cyrus laughed. "No, I swear I'm not funny looking. I have the same eyes, but my mouth is three times as long. It's one of the largest and most admired mouths in Massachusetts. But why these questions? You saw me a few minutes ago when I came

along. The glare of those headlights ought to illuminate any kind of a face."

"You held your hand before your face to shade your eyes."

"So I did. But, seriously, Ruthy, I realize now that all my old feeling for you has never died. Your voice alone revives the memories of those pleasant years. Why part again? It might be forever."

"A thousand reasons."

"But no good ones. What better test of my affection could you want? I don't ask to see your face. Your voice, your words, yourself, and old-time memories are more than enough. Come. Say yes."

"No. Never in the world! Suppose, when you could really see me, there came regrets. What a position for a woman! Oh, no! Never that!"

"Don't say 'never.'"

"Is this a habit of yours—making love in the dark to women you don't know? You should have a guardian."

"Be that guardian!"

"Thank you, I have other occupations."

Here came a silence. The thoughts of Cyrus, whatever they might be, were interrupted by Ruth:

"You must think me a most adaptable woman, Cyrus, to fall in love, at a minute's notice, with a voice and a memory."

"If you are a toothless, hairless, wrinkled, one-eyed hag you ought to be grateful."

"A toothless hag, even with no pride—may have a little caution."

"Anyway," said Cyrus, and he spoke more seriously—and with more decision—"I am in earnest. I may be talking like a fool—I don't know how to express myself. Meeting you again is like a new life. As a little girl, Ruthy, you were everything to me. You don't know what a difference, what a void it made when you vanished and left me adrift. Now that we are again together, and I am older, I realize what I lost. After you left Longfields—and your leaving was awfully sudden, if you remember—not even a chance to say good-by—I used to sit on your doorstep and try to think you would come out."

"Is that true?"

"On my honor. And one moonlight night when father and Joanna thought I was in bed I stood at my window and tried to get a message to you, in the old way—hoping a thought would reach you. Then I stole out of the house, ran to yours and threw little stones against the closed shutters of your empty chamber. Of course no answer came. But I waited and waited. The moonlight seemed to encourage me. And when I had waited in vain—a very long time,—it seemed a year—I pretended you came to the window and we had a long talk."

She laughed. "And what did I say?"

"You said just what I wanted you to say: the nicest things; the things I was yearning for. Quite different from what you are saying to-night."

"If you thought of me so much, why didn't you write to me?"

"I did. I wrote twice."

"I never got them."

"I will tell you why you never got them if you will promise not to laugh."

"I promise."

"They were directed simply to Miss Ruth Heywood, China. And China, I have learned since, is a larger place than Longfields."

"Oh, you poor boy!"

"And when I was a freshman at Cambridge, I tried hard to fall in love with a girl because she reminded me of you."

Ruth was silent. Cyrus went on. "When you first spoke here, a few minutes ago, your voice affected me in a way—in a way I can't describe. It seemed to open vistas of memory, as in a fairy tale. And the instant I realized that we were again together—why—it all came back with a rush—as of sunshine—like a wave, or a flood of unexpected happiness—and hope."

"Oh, Drowsy, what charming nonsense!"

"Yes—it is nonsense, if that kind of love is nonsense—the kind that begins in boyhood and never dies—that holds to one woman and will have no other."

He felt a hand on his arm. In her voice came a gentler note. "Listen, Drowsy. My uncle and I are on our way to a train. I am starting for Italy. When I know my permanent address I will—perhaps—see that you get it—indirectly, but not from me. Then,

without committing either of us, if you are still as blind, as reckless and perverse as you are to-night, you can——”

“Still alive, Ruth?”

The voice came from the darkness and was close behind them.

Cyrus was presented as an old friend. He assisted the uncle in pouring the gasoline into the tank. The uncle was in haste to get away, still hoping to catch a train. There were a few words of parting before the motor with its two occupants slid away into the darkness.

This parting, to Cyrus, seemed even more sudden than the old one, long years ago.

For many minutes he stood looking in their direction. The night was black, and he saw nothing. But in his heart was a rosy dawn.

Incidentally, but of far less importance, he knew on what portion of the earth he had landed.



XII

“INCREDIBLE!”

A PROSPEROUS, self-reliant man, well built, well dressed and well pleased with himself, sat at a desk in his private office. It was the senior partner of the firm—a well known firm of Fifth Avenue jewelers. Being a wise man, he was wise enough to enjoy a reasonable pride in his own wisdom; also in his own pleasing personality, and in his own good face and figure. Now, sixty years of age, he had, moreover, enjoyed a quarter century of success—the reward, perhaps, of his own foresight in being the son of a prosperous father. He had inherited a well established business. As a leading member of a fashionable church he was grateful to himself, and to his Creator, for these, his many blessings.

Another well-dressed man—but younger than himself—entered abruptly and stood beside his desk. The

Senior Partner looked up from his work, nodded, and smiled.

"Good morning, William."

"Good morning, Uncle Fred."

William was dapper, even more up-to-date in appearance than his uncle. Although more carefully attired, he was not so well dressed. For William's hair was so very smooth, and all that pertained to him so aggressively fresh and clean, his clothes so faultlessly in fit, his cravat, his scarf pin, his hair and his eyes such a pleasing harmony in shade and color as to divert the beholder's attention from his sensible face. In appearance William was unjust to himself, giving the impression, to strangers, of a vain or frivolous person. He was, on the contrary, a very intelligent man. Also, he was good. At the present moment there were signs of suppressed excitement in this cleanest of clean faces.

"Well," said the Senior Partner, "out with it."

"You remember Cyrus Alton, don't you, Uncle Fred?"

"No."

"Well, you met him some years ago. It was he who saved me from breaking my neck in the amateur circus at school."

"Oh! And he has regretted it ever since?"

William smiled. "No, sir. I hope not. But it was a mighty plucky thing to do. I fell from the trapeze and he was on the ground beneath. When he saw me coming, instead of jumping from under, like a sensi-

ble boy, he held out his arm to break the fall. It threw his shoulder out of joint, but saved me a broken neck—so we all thought.”

“Yes, I remember now. It *was* a plucky thing. It showed courage and presence of mind. How old was he?”

“About my age: twelve, I guess, or thirteen.”

“He certainly played the hero on that day. Has he lived up to it?”

“I don’t know. I have hardly seen him since we left school. I always liked him. We were great cronies—always together.”

“Mighty lucky you were together on that occasion. What’s his occupation, now?”

“Oh, chemistry and electricity. Science generally, I guess. But I don’t think the world has been treating him well. His clothes are kind of ancient, and he looks hard up. He lives up in Massachusetts, in some little town or village. It’s a dozen years since I have seen him, until he came in, a few minutes ago, with a curious kind of stone. He doesn’t know what it is, and wants to find out. Wants us to tell him. It’s beyond me, though. Would you mind seeing him just a minute, and looking at it?”

“A stone, did you say?”

“Yes, sir.”

“What kind of a stone?”

“That’s just what he doesn’t know, nor I either.”

“All right, show him in.”

To the hero of the amateur circus came a cordial

greeting from the Senior Partner, who alluded in a most friendly manner to that historic occasion. But were he not familiar with the story he would have found difficulty in recognizing the present visitor as the hero of such a day. For that was a deed requiring—to say nothing of courage—quick decision, quick action and that perfect confidence in physical strength which we attribute to the trained athlete. These wide-awake qualities were not suggested in any degree by the slow moving, sleepy eyed young man of slender figure to whom Hurry seemed a stranger. This man was a dreamer. But the Senior Partner had perhaps forgotten that the brightest pages of human history have been furnished by dreamers stirred to action. Moreover, it was clearly evident that this young man and Prosperity were not on friendly terms. And the dark color beneath his eyes seemed to indicate loss of sleep or nervous strain. Now the Senior Partner had never been in love with Poverty. He had the same sort of sympathy for it that Virtue has for Vice; or that Cleanliness has for Dirt. But he was determined, on William's account, to treat his old friend with proper consideration.

After a short conversation, retrospective and educational, the visitor laid in the hand of the Senior Partner what appeared to be a large glass door-knob. It was octagonal in shape with a convex top, and was broken at the stem. The color was a pale, apple green. The Senior Partner adjusted his glasses and politely examined it. He examined it with the same tactful

consideration he would show to any well meaning person who believes his imitation pearl a priceless gem. This case, however, was certainly unusual. The man who could hand you a very large glass door knob and ask your opinion on it, as an expert in gems, required special treatment. And when the Senior Partner studied the visitor's face for some outward indications of the amazing credulity within, he searched in vain. Instead of the eager eyes and parted lips of a touch-and-go enthusiast hoping for sudden wealth, he encountered a firm, though boyish mouth, and two calm, dark, almost drowsy eyes that met his own with a tranquil sanity, having no relation, apparently, to their owner's misguided errand. However, the Senior Partner knew from experience that exteriors were deceptive.

While hesitating for words that might reveal, in the gentlest manner, the fact that the object was worthless, his nephew spoke, and in a tone of eager curiosity.

“What is it, Uncle Fred? What can it be?”

“That's hard to say. It is rather large for a door knob, or the stopper of any human decanter. It might be the pendant of a chandelier.”

“I mean what is it made of? What is the material?”

“You mean what kind of glass?”

“Yes, sir; if it—if it *is* glass.”

“Then you think it is not glass?”

“That's what we want to find out.”

This uncle was not misled by his nephew's earnestness. He knew William, and he knew him to be a

ready believer in interesting things; one who could pin his faith on whatever he really wished to believe. And the uncle had learned that this capacity, combined with a lively imagination, became a perilous guide in matters of business. However, he held the object higher, between his eyes and the window.

"You think it might be rock crystal?" Then, turning to the visitor, "What is your own opinion, Mr. Alton?"

"Oh, I have no opinion; only hopes."

"And what are your hopes?"

Now Cyrus Alton had easily divined the Senior Partner's thoughts. "Hope is so inexpensive," he answered, "that I have been indulging in the brightest kind. But if I am flying too high I can easily come to earth again. Is it nothing but glass, after all?"

"Oh, I don't say that."

But the Senior Partner still marveled that any educated person should prove so gullible as to be deceived by this object in his hand. He looked again, and more carefully, at the visitor's face. This time the boyish mouth seemed to indicate nothing but inexperience. The heavy lidded eyes, however, calmly returned the searching gaze, as if they themselves were searching;—yet in a sleepy way, it seemed to the Senior Partner. And the Senior Partner was strengthened in his conviction that a man with those eyes and with such a mouth could believe almost anything. Yet he liked the young man's face. His voice was pleasant, and his manner of speech, while punctiliously polite and

considerate of others, indicated decision and self-reliance.

“But, Uncle Fred,” said William, “it is so heavy for its size. And it’s cold, like a diamond. And it has that oily feeling on the polished face. It surely is not an artificial stone.”

“No, possibly not. But the color, this pale, apple green, while an exquisite tint, is not usual in diamonds.”

“But the famous ‘Dresden’ is that color, isn’t it?”

“Yes, I believe so; but the famous ‘Dresden’ is smaller than a paving stone. This object, as you see, if a natural stone, must have been nearly twice its present dimensions before cutting. And even now it is fully twice the size of any diamond of which we have ever heard. You young gentlemen will admit that it must be the house of an exceedingly prosperous person where bulky door knobs were composed of single diamonds.”

Nephew William frowned and drummed with his fingers on the top of the desk.

“And I doubt,” continued the Senior Partner with his pleasant smile, “if there are many mines that yield jewels the size of ostrich eggs.”

Cyrus Alton’s eyes, in a dreamy way, were fixed upon the stone. “Couldn’t this have come from some other planet?”

“Possibly, as a meteorite. But precious stones have not the habit of coming from that direction. How-

ever, nothing concerning astronomy can surprise us. Might I ask where you found it, Mr. Alton?"

Mr. Alton hesitated. As he drew a hand across his forehead the Senior Partner and his nephew noticed a hole in the faded and shiny coat sleeve; also that the linen cuff with its frayed edges had no fastenings. William's silent guess was correct. "The poor chap has had to sell his cuff buttons."

"If you don't mind, sir, I would rather not answer that question just at present."

"Certainly. Of course not! Excuse my asking."

"I am the one to apologize, sir. It is a most natural question, and I will answer it later."

"Of course, Mr. Alton, you understand my asking that question. The answer might give us light that would solve the riddle. If, for instance, you found it among broken fragments in a glass factory, we might be prejudiced regarding its ancestry."

"No. It was many miles from any factory."

"On the other hand, if unearthed in a diamond mine, or discovered on the forehead of a Hindoo god it's claim to distinction would be more clearly defined."

"Yes, I suppose so. But I thought an expert might judge the value of a stone without knowing its history."

"Certainly, certainly. But sometimes a ray of light on a doubtful subject facilitates a decision. If this majestic door knob, fragment of a balustrade, pendant to a chandelier, or whatever its original purpose—if this object is a diamond, Mr. Alton, it means a for-

tune to its owner. And I sincerely wish it were a diamond.”

“But you know it isn’t?”

“I don’t say that; but no lapidary would ever cut a diamond as this is cut.” Then, with a friendly smile as he handed it back to its owner, “If William here, or anybody else should offer you real money for it——”

“You advise me to take it.”

The Senior Partner smiled and nodded. Cyrus Alton rose. “I thank you sincerely, sir, for this interview and for your opinion on my bogus gem.” The Senior Partner also rose, and in shaking hands laid his other hand on the visitor’s shoulder. “It may console you, Mr. Alton, to know that you are not the first person—nor the hundredth, for that matter—to be undeceived here in this office. The brightest hopes, especially with would-be pearls and diamonds, often vanish even more swiftly than they come.”

While the smiling, leisurely mouth of Cyrus was getting ready to reply, a door opened, and a man entered. It was a short, stout man with fierce black eyebrows, black eyes and a heavy black beard, all in striking contrast to the whitest and baldest of heads.

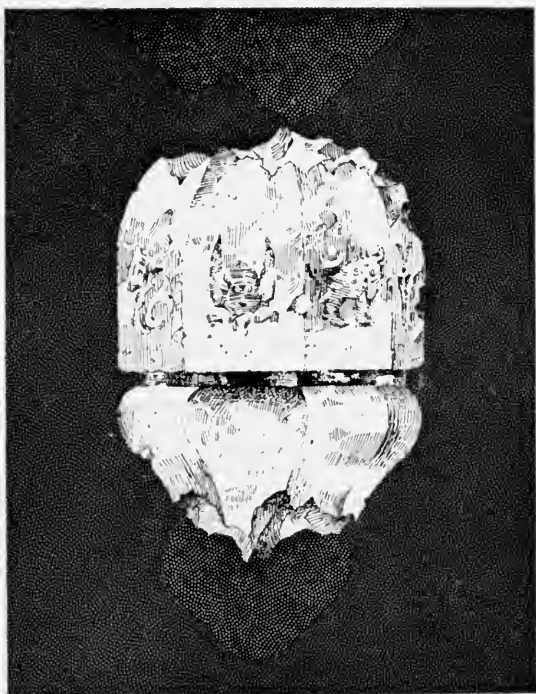
“Ah, Mr. Bressani!” exclaimed the Senior Partner. “You are just the man!” After presenting Mr. Bressani to the visitor he said: “Give us the truth about this stone. What is it?” And he took the stone from Cyrus and handed it to the new arrival.

Now Mr. Bressani was more than an expert. His

instinct in the matter of gems was abnormal. It was something more than instinct. It was a singular, innate sense; one of those unexplained faculties that enables its possessor to judge offhand, with certainty and precision, where others must weigh and reason. In important matters he was sought by jewelers. And there was no recorded case in which he had been deceived.

Now, as he held the doubtful object in his fat, white fingers, he suspected from the smile on the face of the Senior Partner that a joke was in the air. When he saw what was in his hand—apparently a piece of greenish glass—he raised his heavy black eyebrows, and, with a sidelong glance, studied the faces of the three men, one after another, to make sure they were not laughing at him. Nephew William smiled but shook his head. “No, we are serious. Tell us what you think.”

Still doubtful, Mr. Bressani held it nearer his eye, turned it over in his large, baby fingers, moved it slowly up and down, evidently guessing its weight, and slowly passed a thumb over its surface. Then, as if surprised, he stepped hastily to the window and held it between his eyes and the light. Wheeling about, his eyebrows darted up in surprise. These eyebrows, thick and heavy, flew heavenward so swiftly and they traveled so far that they seemed to pull upon his big black eyes to twice their usual size and roundness. These astonished orbs he rolled toward the three men as if startled by a miracle. They proclaimed a be-



"BUT WHO EVER SAW SUCH A DIAMOND?"—Page 199

wildering, overwhelming astonishment that his half-open lips could not express.

“Why, it’s a diamond!”

The Senior Partner rose and moved toward him. “Are you sure?”

But Mr. Bressani did not reply. Lost in wonder, apparently unconscious of his surroundings, he turned the object over and over, in every light, and at every angle. “Extraordinary!” he murmured. “Extraordinary! It doesn’t seem possible.”

“But are you sure?” repeated the Senior Partner.

“Absolutely.”

“But who ever saw such a diamond?”

“Nobody! Nobody! It’s incredible—miraculous—inconceivable. There never *was* such a thing!”

“Just what I have been saying,” from the Senior Partner. “Nobody would ever cut a diamond in that shape. And look at the size of it! And the color!”

“Yes, yes! It’s hard to believe!”

“But you *do* believe it?”

The bushy eyebrows went up, then down, with a shrug of shoulders. “Believe it? I know it! What do *you* think it is, glass?”

“Well—er—yes, to be honest. I didn’t know what else it could be. No human being ever saw a diamond of those dimensions.”

“We are seeing it now. But whose is it?”

“It belongs to Mr. Alton.”

“I congratulate you, Mr. Alton. You possess the most amazing diamond in history or fiction.”

Cyrus bowed. "Then it is the largest you have ever seen?"

"Twice over. The famous Culinan stone, the largest yet discovered, was about half this size."

"Let's weigh it," said William.

The expert placed it on the little scales that stood on the top of the Senior Partner's desk. The three men waited in silence for the verdict. After a close scrutiny of the scales Mr. Bressani straightened up, turned toward the three pairs of eyes—all fixed intently on his own—and exclaimed:

"Really—it is hard to believe!"

"How much?" came, in the same breath, from the Senior Partner and his nephew.

"Seventy-one hundred carats!"

The nephew laughed nervously. "Why—there never was such a diamond!"

The Senior Partner frowned. "Impossible!"

Mr. Bressani's hand trembled slightly, as he lifted the stone from the scales and again held it to the light.

"Yes—yes—it does seem impossible!"

"But nobody ever saw such a diamond!" was again announced by William.

"Never!" from Mr. Bressani.

"How much did the Culinan weigh?" William asked.

"About three thousand and thirty carats in the rough—about a pound and three-quarters. It was cut into three large stones and several smaller ones.

Two of these stones are the largest brilliants in existence.”

“But, are you sure, Bressani,” said the Senior Partner, “absolutely sure that it *is* a diamond?”

Mr. Bressani smiled, shrugged his shoulders, and with a gesture of both hands, palms out, replied, slowly:

“I am not a rich man, but whatever property I possess, and whatever I can borrow up to a million dollars I would gladly give to Mr. Alton if I might own this stone.”

Cyrus Alton’s eyes opened wider. “A million dollars?”

“Easily. You see, it will cut to four or five stones of extraordinary size, and—unless I am much mistaken—of perfect purity. Also, the color—this lovely, delicate, applegreen tint is almost unknown. The only diamond of this color in the world, of any importance, is the famous Dresden Green, one of the crown jewels of Saxony.”

“Is this much larger,” inquired Cyrus, “than that Dresden diamond?”

“Many times larger.”

“And much larger than any of the famous diamonds?”

“Yes, indeed! Much, much, very much larger. No comparison, in fact. Why, Mr. Alton, if this were cut to one stone, half its present size—as a rough guess—it would be over three thousand carats.”

Nephew William gasped. “Three thousand carats!

Why, there's nothing like it! It would be the most famous stone in the world!"

"No doubt about that," said Mr. Bressani.

"How much is the Great Mogul?" asked William.

"Less than two hundred carats."

"And the Koh-i-noor?"

"One hundred and eight."

"And the Star of the South?"

"About a hundred and twenty-seven carats."

"Did you ever see the Hope diamond?"

"Yes; forty-five carats. Almost circular in shape; sold for eighteen thousand pounds. But it is believed—at least there is a story—that it brings bad luck to its owners."

"It is blue, isn't it?"

"Yes, blue, and a good color, but not so beautiful nor so rare, as this shade of green. This is a wonder." And as he spoke he turned the stone in every light. "It's a marvelous thing. Marvelous! Almost unbelievable!"

"Can you tell me," said Cyrus, "about how much it is worth?"

Mr. Bressani shrugged his shoulders: "Anything."

"You mean," said the Senior Partner, "it would be impossible to guess, even approximately, at its value?"

"Yes. For you know the value of diamonds is speculative—depending on many conditions; size, shape, purity, color—and how they cut. The Victoria—one hundred and eighty carats—was sold for four hundred thousand pounds. But diamonds were rarer

then. This, when properly cut into the right number of stones, would bring more than three million dollars.”

William, in his enthusiasm, slapped his friend on the back. “Well, old man, you have struck it rich this time.”

The calm-eyed Cyrus smiled and nodded.

“Then this diamond of mine,” he said, “would be ten times bigger than the Koh-i-noor or any of those other stones?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Isn’t there a famous Sanci diamond?”

“Oh, yes. But that weighed only fifty-three carats. The Sanci diamond was famous more from its unusual history than from its size.”

“What was its history, Bressani?” said the Senior Partner. “I never heard it.”

“Well, it belonged to Charles the Bold, Duke of Burgundy, who was wearing it in his hat at the battle of Nancy, the day he was killed. A Swiss soldier found it and sold it to a clergyman for a gulden; about forty cents. Then it came into possession of Anton, King of Portugal, who sold it for 100,000 Francs. Soon afterwards it became the property of a French gentleman named Sanci. A descendant of this Sanci was sent by Henry III as ambassador to Soluere and the King required the diamond as a pledge. The servant who was carrying it to the King was attacked by robbers and murdered, but before dying he swallowed the diamond. His master, knowing his devotion, had

the body opened and found the diamond in his stomach."

"And where is it now?" asked Cyrus.

"It was bought by a Russian nobleman in 1835, for half a million rubles; about four hundred thousand dollars."

"Jove!" exclaimed William. "Some difference in price between forty cents and four hundred thousand dollars!"

"And how much bigger," asked William, "is this than the Sanci?"

"That weighed fifty-three carats. This, when cut, would weigh about three thousand."

"Jove! Sixty times as much! Would it be worth sixty times four hundred thousand dollars? That would be about twenty-four million dollars."

Mr. Bressani smiled and shook his head. "Times were different then—and to-day there are more diamonds."

"I suppose many of the famous jewels," said William, "if they could speak, might tell us stories as surprising as the Sanci's."

Then Cyrus Alton, in a low voice, addressing nobody in particular, said: "It would be worth the price of this diamond to know its history."

The Bressani eyebrows went up—high up—and then far down. And beneath the frown the fierce eyes looked eagerly toward the speaker. "Has it a remarkable history, Mr. Alton?"

Cyrus smiled, slowly and somewhat sadly, and

gently shook his head. “I wish I knew. I would almost give the diamond’s price to know its story—much as I need the money.”

“Do you know nothing of its history?”

“Nothing. I only know that if we could see what that stone has seen we should enter a new field of knowledge. It would throw light upon a world of unknown things, earlier than human history.”

In silence the jewelers regarded the speaker, as if waiting for some explanation of his words.

Mr. Bressani’s eyebrows had shot up to the highest attitude yet attained. In a low voice, but in a tone that showed the liveliest curiosity, he asked, “Just what do you mean, Mr. Alton?”

“I mean the story of this diamond’s country would be a story so overwhelming, so far beyond us, so complete and final in its stupendous tragedy that our own human drama would seem a trifling comedy.”

These words were spoken in a calm but earnest manner, and they impressed the listeners. A silence followed. Then Mr. Bressani asked: “What *is* this diamond’s country?”

Cyrus hesitated. He knew that if he told the truth it would appear incredible to his hearers—like a fairy tale for children: that he would be regarded either as a fool, to be pitied, or as a willful liar. While he hesitated the Senior Partner came to his rescue.

“Mr. Alton has already informed us that he has reasons for not telling where he found it.”

Mr. Bressani’s enthusiasm, however,—and his curi-

osity—were far too strong for accepting so easy a defeat. “But what part of the world? He can tell us that.”

“As a matter of fact,” said Cyrus, “I don’t know, myself, the name of that particular country.”

Again the bushy Bressani eyebrows sailed aloft, then dropped and beetled over the fierce black eyes. “You don’t know in what country you were when you found it—or bought it?”

“I am not sure that it has a name.”

“A most unusual country!”

“Yes, it certainly is;—most unusual.”

Nephew William laughed. “And it must be a long way off, Cyrus.”

“It is.”

“And pretty small, if it has no name.”

“No, not so small. But its name was long ago forgotten. There are no survivors to remember it.”

“But you can tell us,” said Mr. Bressani, “whether it is North of here, or East, or West, or South.”

“Why—er—really, I couldn’t tell you even that. Nobody could.”

“Perhaps it’s beneath us, or above”; and in the Senior Partner’s tone was a suggestion of irony.

Cyrus ignored the tone and answered pleasantly: “I am not trying to deceive, or to mislead you in any way, but it really is a journey in which points of the compass are no guides whatever.”

On the faces of the three jewelers came three involuntary frowns.



"A MOST UNUSUAL COUNTRY!"—Page 200



“You are certainly having fun with us, Cyrus,” said William.

“No, not at all. But, you see, a compass would be useless where there is no such thing as North and South.”

“No such thing as North and South!”

“No. Nor East and West. The needle would lose its bearings. It wouldn’t know where to point.”

“Oh, come now! Is that a joke? Are we to laugh at it?”

Cyrus smiled. “I should not blame you for laughing—but it is not a joke. I am telling the truth.”

“You mean to say, I suppose, that you had such bad weather—electrical storms, perhaps,—that the needle couldn’t work.”

“No, there was no weather at all.”

“You mean no bad weather?”

“Nor good weather, either.”

With some impatience William demanded: “Now just what do you mean, Cyrus?”

“I mean, that in going and coming, there was no such thing as wind nor rain, nor sunshine. It was all twilight—a dusk that was almost darkness. It was a trackless, uncharted voyage. And not a shore to touch at.”

“Then you crossed an ocean? It was all by sea?”

“No. There was no sea—no water anywhere.”

This time William made no effort to hide his annoyance. He merely whistled, and walked away, toward the window.

"I don't blame you, Billy, for being enraged," and Cyrus also stood up. "But on my honor, I am telling you the truth. And I am willing to tell you anything except the exact location. Later on you will understand my reasons for being so secretive."

"Perhaps you can tell us," said Mr. Bressani, "in what surroundings you found it: whether under ground or above."

"Above. Just lying on the ground."

"My own guess," said William, "from its being already cut, is that some oriental chap either gave it to you or sold it."

"No, I found it, entirely by accident—among some ruins."

Mr. Bressani's eyebrows again went up. "Ruins of what?"

"Of an ancient building—a very, very ancient building."

"But covered with earth, I suppose, and overgrown with vines."

"No. Not a trace of vegetation anywhere in sight."

"It must be a melancholy place."

"It is."

"But once a city?"

"I think so."

"The ruins of Palmyra!" exclaimed Mr. Bressani. "They are now a sandy waste."

"No; many thousands of miles from Palmyra."

"Many thousands of miles! That means a long distance."



"BUT ONCE A CITY?" - Page 208



"OLDER THAN HUMAN HISTORY" Page 209

"It is a long distance."

"Then it can't be any part of Asia, or even India?"

"No, sir."

"Africa, perhaps?"

"No."

"A South American diamond?"

"No."

As Mr. Bressani's ferocious, black eyebrows settled down over his eyes the Senior Partner laughed. "This reminds me of the game of twenty questions. And you are surely the victor, Mr. Alton."

But Mr. Bressani was too much in earnest to think of jokes or games. "You say these ruins are very old?"

"Yes, sir."

"How old? Greek or Roman, perhaps?"

"Older than human history."

Again the three listeners frowned. With a shade of sarcasm the Senior Partner addressed his nephew: "Mr. Alton has a poet's fancy."

Cyrus understood, but his face showed no annoyance. Smilingly he said, "You will get more digestible answers, perhaps, if you don't ask me where I found it. The whole adventure is incredible. If I told you the truth you would not believe me."

"Try us," said William.

The Senior Partner waved his hand in apology. "Please don't think we doubt your word, Mr. Alton. But when you say older than human history you are speaking figuratively, as it were."

"No, sir. I am speaking literally. It is the belief of scientists that millions of years have passed since any changes have occurred in that—in that—territory."

"Millions of years!"

"Yes, sir. It is somewhat a matter of geology. And a geological period, you know, is still young at a million years."

The Senior Partner nodded politely. "Yes—very true. But, as diamonds are found in so few places perhaps you will tell us, just to gratify a natural curiosity, what kind of a region you have discovered—the general nature of the country."

"The nature of the country?" Cyrus Alton repeated. Then, lowering his eyes, as if better to recall the scene, he hesitated for a moment. "The nature of the country," he again repeated, and his manner became serious. "No tree, nor bush, nor blade of grass is there; no living thing of any kind: no birds—nor air to fly in;—not a drop of water. The surface of the earth—no, not earth for there is no earth—is stone—and ashes. 'Tis a cinder—the mummy of a world: an unending necropolis. Once it was thickly populated. Now it is the Land of Death, and deader than Death itself. Not even a memory is there, for those who might remember have been dead uncounted ages. They themselves are long since forgotten."

On the faces of his little audience Cyrus saw a mild bewilderment—and curiosity.

“You say we have all heard of this country?” asked the Senior Partner.

“Yes, and you have seen it—from a distance.”

“Are you sure,” said William, “that we have all seen it?”

“Yes, absolutely sure.”

“And we have probably been there?”

“No—I think not.”

“Then, how could we see it?—from a railway train—or from a steamship?”

Cyrus smiled. “Yes, you could see it that way—if you wished.”

“But how do you know we have never been there?”

“I don’t.”

“You only think it.”

“Yes, I only think it. You may have been there. I am quite sure, however, that you have not.”

“But why so sure, Cyrus?” You have been there yourself.”

“Yes.”

“And what man has done man can do.”

“Yes, sometimes, but not always, Billy. Only one man has eaten, for instance, a certain huckleberry. And, as a rule, only one man marries his own particular girl. You, for instance, have seen the top of Trinity spire, but you have never been there.”

“You may as well say I have seen the moon, but never been there.”

Cyrus laughed, quite a hearty little laugh, as if

thoroughly amused. "Well I do say it. And it's true, isn't it?"

"Yes, but it has no relation to the argument."

"Why not? I am merely proving my statement, that you have seen interesting places which you have never visited. Either Trinity spire or the moon might hold this diamond."

"But Trinity spire does not fit your description of the country."

Again Cyrus seemed amused. "But the moon fits it."

William laughed. "Well, Cyrus, you are just the same boy in an argument that you were at school. And how mad I used to get! But this mysterious land that you are concealing so successfully, the land we have all seen but never touched—or even heard about, apparently—must be a God-forsaken district. Is it a desert—like Sahara, for instance?"

"No, quite different. This is rock, with plains of lava from volcanic mountains and everywhere, in all directions, dust and ashes: the dried bones of its own past—whatever it was. The whole surface of the country seems upheaved and torn, all on a gigantic scale, as if it was baked too much, then split and sundered in the cooling. A fantastic, solemn region."

"Well, by Jove!" said William, at last, "I still maintain that I have never seen the place—nor anything like it."

"I said from a distance."

"Must have been a mighty long distance."



" THE DRIED BONES OF ITS OWN PAST, WHATEVER IT WAS" Page 212



"BUT WHY BUILD THEIR CITIES IN THOSE SENSELESS CHASMS" *Pg. 211*

“It was.”

“And a mighty unusual country!”

“It is. Scattered about are high mountains, once volcanoes. And in the craters of these old volcanoes some of them many miles across, I saw the ruins of cities. There must be hundreds of these mountains, and hundreds of ruined cities.”

“Then you traveled over the whole country.”

“No, indeed! But I looked down on it as I approached, and could take in a vast area.”

William straightened up, and his eyes opened wider. “Oho! Then you went there in an air-ship!”

Cyrus nodded.

“That accounts for no water on the voyage, and all that other stuff you gave us.

Again Cyrus nodded. And, with a broad smile of amusement: “It might also account for Trinity spire and the moon.”

But his audience was too much in earnest to be thwarted by jokes. “Yes, yes!” said Mr. Bressani. “That explains much that you have said. Please continue.”

William, however, with a frown, leaned back against the desk. “Cyrus, I still believe you are lying to us.”

“No, truly I am not. I don’t pretend to give you the whole truth, but what I do tell you is the truth and nothing else.”

“Go on, Mr. Alton,” said the Senior Partner. “We interrupted you. It certainly is an amazing country.”

Cyrus continued. "The whole country is cracked and broken with chasms. From one volcano cañons radiate in all directions. They are miles in width, and they seem bottomless. And even in these cañons, on projecting ledges, are the ruins of cities."

"But why should they build their cities in those sunless chasms?"

"My belief is that the moisture evaporated, then the surface of all that country became so unbearably hot—with no atmosphere as protection from the sun's rays—that the inhabitants were driven to the cañons."

"What a life! No wonder they all died!"

"That portion of the universe," said Cyrus, "is the desolation of desolation, the tragedy of tragedies. It is a world of ashes. And over everything an awful silence, a silence that frightens you. The stillness of death, compared to it, is a merry waltz."

"How did you happen to find this country?"

"I had heard of it. You all know about it in a general way, as I have already said. But I tried to get there and happened to succeed."

William shook his head. "Sorry to contradict you, Cyrus, but I never heard of such a place."

Cyrus laughed. "Oh, yes, you have! Excuse me, but you have all read about it, and seen many pictures of it."

Mr. Bressani took up the diamond. As he caressed the glistening marvel he asked: "Do other people know of these ruins?"

"I think not,"



"AND OVER EVERYTHING AN AWFUL SILENCE" *Page 211*



"— A WORLD OF DUST AND ASHES" —Page 211

“You have never heard of any one else who has been there?”

“Never.”

“Is the district difficult to reach?”

“Very—almost impossible. In fact the trip is so long and risky that you need have no fear of other explorers. I tell you this merely that you may know the chances are small of the market being flooded with diamonds—at least from that quarter. Nobody else will try it. You may be sure of that. The diamonds are there, however, and plenty of them.”

“Plenty of them!”

“Plenty—by the cart-load.”

William whistled. And the two older men whistled—in spirit—and raised their eyebrows. With the Bressani eyebrows still in the air their owner inquired: “You say this was lying on the top of the ground?”

“Yes; among other fragments.”

“Fragments of what?”

For a moment the visitor closed his eyes. “That is hard to answer. I was there at dusk. The light was peculiar, and uncertain—and changing. I should say there were fragments of cups and vases, of carved capitals, scraps of metal that might be architectural ornaments, all mingled with blocks of some white material, perhaps marble, or alabaster. And all finely carved.”

“These things were scattered about the ground?”

“Scattered about, but not literally on the ground. Many were lying on a pavement of different colored

stones— the floor of a building I should say. The outer walls and several columns were still standing.”

“It might have been a palace, a temple, a forum,— almost anything of size and importance.”

“You know nothing of the history of those people, of their manners and customs?”

“Nothing, whatever.”

“Where could I find out? That is, of course, if we had your permission.”

“Nowhere. Nobody knows. It is all forgotten— long ago forgotten—with no records, no memories— not even a tradition.”

There was a silence. Cyrus knew that his hearers were having more or less difficulty in digesting his statements. However, he smiled pleasantly, as he said: “My sympathies are with you, gentlemen, and my thanks for your courteous reception of my absurd story. But there is one thing I do know about these people. Although their buildings were often as high as ours, I know their legs were shorter. All their stone steps, in every case, had risers about half the size of ours.”

“Ah! Then they were a race of pigmies.”

“I should think so, and with long arms and very short legs. They were evidently strong on sculpture, as there are fragments of statues, heads, bas reliefs, monuments, etc., all scattered about. And the people represented are very much like ourselves, in some ways.”



"THE DIAMONDS ARE THERE, AND PLENTY OF THEM" Page 215



"WITH LONG ARMS AND VERY SHORT LEGS" *Page 216*

“You say you were there at dusk. Why didn’t you see it by day light?”

“Well, the—er—climate is peculiar. The air, if you can call it air, is so very rarefied as to be no protection whatever against the heat of the sun. And the surface of the ground, by daylight, would burn your feet. And by night, there being no atmosphere twixt you and space, the temperature is about 300 degrees below zero.”

“Three hundred degrees!”

Cyrus smiled and nodded. “That’s what the scientists say. I had no thermometer with me.”

“But no human being could live in such a temperature!”

“That is why I stuck to the twilight. And I suspect that is why the cities were built in the cañons.”

“Why, of course! That explains it. I was wondering what on earth could induce anybody to want to live in those God-forsaken chasms.”

Mr. Bressani, however, had a deeper interest in abnormal gems than in climatic conditions. “Did you find this piece all alone, by itself,—apart from others?”

“No; other pieces were near it.”

“But not so large as this.”

“Oh, yes! Some were much larger.”

Mr. Bressani frowned. “Larger than this?”

“Yes, much larger.”

“But not diamonds—not this same material?”

“I suppose they were. They looked just like it.”

"Then why didn't you bring a larger piece? It would be a fabulous fortune, in itself."

Cyrus seemed uncertain as to his answer. "Well—there were—many reasons. One was that I did not know they were diamonds. Another was that I needed both hands for other purposes and could not carry—just at that moment—anything too large to go in my pocket. In fact I tried to pick up a beautifully carved fragment nearly the size of a foot-ball, but I had to drop it for this smaller one."

The three jewelers regarded him with eager faces, as children listen to a fairy tale. Mr. Bressani in a low, somewhat awe stricken tone, said:

"And there is really much of it?"

"Lots of it."

"But, of course, you are not absolutely sure it is the same material?"

"Well—I saw the other part of the one in your hand lying beside it, and it was four or five times the size of this one."

The three men turned to each other, as if to discover the effect, on other human beings, of such a statement.

The Senior Partner leaned forward, each hand grasping an arm of his chair. The Bressani eyebrows shot aloft, and he came a step nearer. Nephew William adjusted his lips for a whistle, but changed his mind. No sound came forth.

It was the Senior Partner who was the first to find himself, and return to business. Leaning back in his

chair he cleared his throat. “Mr. Alton, if you were not an old friend of William’s, and if I knew nothing about you, I should say that Munchausen, by comparison, was a clumsy beginner. But your own reputation and that stone in Mr. Bressani’s hand, are proofs to the contrary—the best of proofs. Now let us get to business. Is it your wish to sell this diamond to us?”

“Yes, sir. That’s why I came here. And I would prefer dealing with your house, if you care to bother with it.”

The Senior Partner smiled. “It would be an unenterprising jeweler who declined to bother with what will soon become the most famous diamond of history—ancient or modern. If agreeable to you, Mr. Alton, you can leave the stone with us, and we will give you, now, a receipt for an uncut diamond of seventy-one hundred carats, value unknown. A few days hence, at your convenience, we will submit for your consideration a plan by which you shall receive a certain amount at once in cash, the balance to be governed by the final value of the stones as they are cut or sold. Would that be satisfactory to you?”

“Perfectly.”

“And perhaps you will agree to give us the preference if you decide later to flood the market with diamonds the size of paving stones.”

Cyrus smiled. “Yes, sir, I shall be glad to do so.”

A few moments later, the receipt in his pocket, Cyrus left the private office, escorted by William. At

the street door, as the young jeweler, at parting, shook hands with his friend, he said: "And, by the way, old man, when you can divulge the awful secret of where you found it don't waste a second in telling us."

"If there is a humorous side to this morning's interview, Billy, it is in the name of that very place."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean I mentioned the name, and more than once."

"Stuff!"

"On my honor."

"What was it?"

"Oh, that's too easy! Good-by."

And he left William standing in the doorway,—still guessing.

Alone together, the unparalleled, incredible wonder on the desk before them, the Senior Partner and Mr. Bressani remained silent for a time, as if recovering from a dream. For the twentieth time that morning, Mr. Bressani murmured: "It seems impossible!" Then, after another silence: "But where did he get it? Has he been to the very center of the earth?"

"Or," said the Senior Partner, with a shrug, "to the mountains of the moon."



XIII

A MESSAGE

TO be lifted, suddenly, from poverty to wealth, is delightful. Especially delightful when preceded by a preliminary course of self-denial. For Cyrus and his father there was now an end, at last, to the orthodox but discordant partnership between Pride and Want.

Vaulting ambition has its uses. So have rags and hunger. And there are times, as in the case of Cyrus, when they pull together. But now had come the harvest. And the prosperity was real: the checks from the Senior Partner were not a dream.

"No more cheap food and shiny clothes for us," said Cyrus to his father. "Me for gluttony; canvas backs three times a day; Burgundy and dollar cigars. And brand new raiment every morning!"

Dr. Alton nodded. "Yes, that's a good program.

A change, even from bad to worse, is often beneficial. Had you been brought up on canvas backs and Burgundy, you might have yearned for water and dried apples."

One of the first things Cyrus did was to visit Mrs. Eagan. The great desire of her life had been to revisit Ireland, but she never could save enough money. She had tried in vain to sell her little cottage with its two acres of land. Now came a purchaser. For the acre farthest from the house, for which there never had been a bid, Cyrus paid her three thousand dollars. And the happy Mrs. Eagan went to Ireland. He did other things, equally unbusinesslike. Some for his old friends; some for the town itself.

As for the Great Discovery both Cyrus and his father were of one opinion—that it never must be made public: that the secret must die. One of many reasons was, that with such a power in irresponsible hands no man's property, and no man himself, would be secure. What safety for a law abiding citizen when any criminal could purchase for a few dollars and carry in his hand, or pocket, a weapon of unlimited energy and force? The burglar or the highwayman could either escape at will or send his victim into farthest space.

He had various kinds of fun with his money. But he was no fool with it. He had been too intimate with debt, half-rations and shabby raiment to renew, voluntarily, the old acquaintance. But the greatest satisfaction of all was the prospect of bringing a long

deferred pleasure to his father. Dr. Alton had spoken in years gone by of a trip to Europe. And now he could have it. Moreover, this trip abroad, according to Cyrus, was to be such a new departure in activity and leisure, in wisdom and extravagance, as to startle Europe.

"We'll make Croesus look like thirty cents—and Lucullus a skinflint."

But Fate, brainless Fate, whose rewards and punishments seem random shots, stepped in between. And the blow that came to Cyrus was the hardest in his life.

To the people of Longfields there was mystery in certain periods of Dr. Alton's past. Those seven years abroad were secret history. The little son and his unknown mother had invited explanation. But explanations were not offered. Moreover, it was soon realized by his neighbors that Dr. Alton's private affairs were his own, and were not for publication. But people had surely a right to wonder why a physician with his exceptional education and opportunities should give so little thought to distinction in larger fields and prefer obscurity in a forgotten little village.

Miss Anita Clement and some other women believed that this handsome young doctor had been the victim of a blighting passion; that his heart, if not broken, had received a wound that never healed. But all that was speculative.

Of some things, however, they were sure. One was that his gentle manner, his never failing help and kind-

ness to poor and prosperous alike, had resulted in a sincere affection for him, not only in Longfields itself but in the neighboring villages. To every member of the little community in which he lived and worked for nearly thirty years his death was a personal loss.

To Cyrus, this sudden, unexpected ending was a blow that stunned. Many days were to pass before he fully realized how irreparable was his loss. That his father's death should come when it did made sorrow doubly keen. Of what good this sudden wealth when his best friend, after these years of economy and self sacrifice, was not here to enjoy it? And that trip abroad together—only a month away!

Cyrus had this consolation, however, that the end was free from suffering.

An hour before his death—in a sunny November afternoon—his father was reclining comfortably in his easy chair when he told Cyrus where to find a package of letters in the further corner of a certain drawer in his desk. Cyrus brought them. Then he sat by his father's side and, as the letters, after being read, were handed him, one by one, he dropped them into the fire. Some were limp and worn from many readings. With them was a photograph of a woman's face. After a moment's hesitation Dr. Alton handed it to his son.

"That's your mother, Cyrus."

With unspeakable emotion the son gazed upon this face. Her eyes looked straight into his own. They were deep, dark, tragic—yet smiling. It seemed to

Cyrus that he had always known this face—and loved it. He gazed in silence, overcome by feelings quite different from anything he had heretofore experienced. His father's voice recalled him to himself. The voice was becoming weaker.

"Destroy this picture, Cyrus. If you ever meet her keep your knowledge to yourself. Let her be the first—to greet you."

So low was his voice that Cyrus bent forward to get his words.

"Remember, always remember, she is a good woman."

Dr. Alton leaned back and closed his eyes.

A faint smile came to his lips. He whispered a name—

"Francesca."

His thoughts wandered. In spirit he was far from Longfields. Below him gleamed the Adriatic, azure blue. The breath of spring came gently to his cheeks. Before him, and very near, is a woman's face, radiant with beauty and with love, and with unfailing devotion. Her eyes looking deep into his own, searching his innermost thoughts. There are none to hide, for all are hers.

The smile still upon his lips he murmured in French—his voice fainter with each succeeding word—a message.

And the last word, "Francesca," was scarcely a breath.

Cyrus knew that another spirit had joined the count-

less host: that into these final words a faithful lover had breathed his soul.

At that sunny hour of the afternoon, in Longfields, night had fallen in the city of Milan. The great opera house was crowded. To lovers of music the farewell appearance of the Diva was a memorable occasion. It was also cause for surprise, but physicians had given warning of a certain weakness about the heart. Besides, it may have been that after thirty years of triumph—though apparently as young as ever—there had come a surfeit of glory; a yearning for the tranquil life; for days and nights of less effort and less excitement.

So, still beautiful, erect as ever, and looking to perfection the heroine, with the fresh, full voice of girlhood that charmed the world, she was singing to-night before an audience, or rather, a host of friends, that filled the great building from the floor to the topmost seats. Both the glorious voice and the Diva herself seemed unchanged. To-night she was still the envy of other singers. And to-night, as usual, she thrilled an enchanted audience.

Near the end of the second act came a surprise. Then it was that the great singer seemed conquered by some strange emotion—some mysterious agency that hushed her voice and enslaved her spirit. And to that audience it always remained a mystery.

Softly, from the orchestra, rose the accompaniment



"But the Diva was far away. She heard nothing save the thing unheard by others."



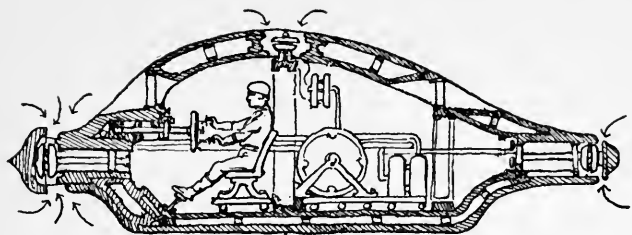
to the aria—the divine aria—flooding the house with its melody. The Diva, with lips parting for the opening notes, was moving slowly toward the front of the stage. Then, instead of the voice for which the hundreds of eager listeners were waiting, they saw her stop, and stand in silence. With eyes closed, and face upturned, transfigured—as angels' faces are transfigured—she stood, unconscious of the world about her. Vainly the audience waited. Vainly the conductor waved his baton, as his orchestra, with every bar, was leaving the Diva still further behind.

But the Diva was far away. She heard him not. She heard nothing save the thing unheard by others. The orchestra and its leader, the opera house and the people in it, all had vanished—all had vanished as completely from her thoughts as from her sight. The very music itself helped the spirit's flight—to bear it aloft, to transport her far—oh far indeed!—from where she stood.

As a dying zephyr mingles with the fragrance of the flowers, so with the harmony of the music came, from over seas, a lover's message. Her name—Francesca—interwoven with the melody, came gently to her senses. She knew from whom. And she alone knew what memories it revived, crowding upon her through the music; precious memories of the only passion of her life; of the one being to whom she had given her heart, her self, her very soul—and for all time. Now, once again, they were meeting. It came, the message, not in words—merely the breath

of a dying lover. It brought this truth, that all joy of living had ended at their parting—nearly thirty years ago. Not a moment in those years had his devotion wavered, a devotion greater and more real than all else in life, beyond and far above the reach of death. Now, on the borders of that other world where loyal hearts shall know no parting—there she would find him waiting. Again her name—Francesca—fading away into the melody of the aria.

The Diva lowered her face, pressed a hand against her temples and swayed as if to fall. But her recovery was sudden. She smiled toward the sea of anxious faces and nodded to the conductor, who started his orchestra afresh. Then she sang the aria as never before.



XIV

OVER SEAS

THERE was music in Cyrus. As a boy, however, he could never get it out. With no voice for singing his main relief was in whistling and humming and in drumming with his fingers. Which, of course, made him more or less of a nuisance at times. When he grew up his voice improved. Not enough to outshine the nightingales, but it served for domestic purposes. At church, for instance, he joined the congregation in the hymns. His voice, in speaking, was low, with a pleasant quality, and was more than satisfactory for ordinary human intercourse. But as a musical instrument it aroused no enthusiasm. His father had said, on one occasion: "The louder you sing, Cyrus, the less noise you make."

But music had always moved him, and in a singular way; much as many others are affected, perhaps, but

more profoundly. It touched strange chords, deep within him. It inspired him, and seemed to bring a keener edge to his capacity for pain or pleasure; lifting him, at times, far away from himself, to a world where other people are not too real; where beauty and virtue, power, glory and justice are at one's own command. Music brought these things to Cyrus—also other things for which a young man's soul is thirsting.

One evening in May there was a service in the church in which the congregation—Cyrus included—had joined in the singing. After the service he walked home alone. As he entered his own grounds the music of the last hymn echoed in his brain. Still humming it, he stopped and looked up at the stars. The solemn stillness of the night brought memories of his father. And as he stood there, gazing at the stars, he felt in the night air itself an unfamiliar element; something that awakened within him emotions unrelated to his outward senses. There was no moon, but from countless stars came flickering beams—faint greetings from other worlds. He seemed alone in the Great Silence—alone in the universe itself; in closer communion with hidden things. From out the darkness, mingling with the silence, yet almost silence itself, there came to him a breath—a murmur. It was not the evening breeze among the branches of the maples. It was the gentlest music, but not the echoes in his brain of the evening hymn. No—it came from far away. It seemed personal—directed to himself. For a time he stood without moving, every faculty alert.

Not with his ears did he listen, but with a deeper sense, as of one spirit striving for communion with another. At last the music, the voice, the indefinable melody died away, gently, into the silence of the night.

Patiently he waited. Then, after a time, when nothing came, he opened his eyes and lowered his face. In the continued silence about him he began to suspect that his own brain might have been deceiving him; that the message was from his own imagination. And was it a message? It had told him nothing. So far as he could divine it was a call—a prayer, but clearly to himself. Still wondering, he entered the house, did his customary little chores, then went upstairs to bed.

For a time he lay awake, thinking, but once asleep his sleep was sound. From this sleep, however, he was awakened by what seemed a whispered voice within the room. He sat up in his bed, and spoke.

“Who is it?”

Then came—as before, when he was standing beneath the stars—the almost inaudible, far-away echo of a song. He listened, with every sense alert. And, as before, it seemed addressed distinctly to himself—an appeal to come. But where? So real was the entreaty that he obeyed an impulse, arose from his bed and prepared to dress. As he stood at his eastern window a few moments later, he heard again—or thought he heard—the alluring voice.

A faint, cool light at the horizon was creeping slowly upward, along the edges of the earth.

Yes, it came from off there. And he would follow it. Why not? His father was gone. What held him in Longfields—or anywhere else? Moreover, he had power to travel as was not given to other men. Besides, it pleased him to believe in this need for himself, this call to danger, death or sacrifice—or whatever it might be. To him it had become a prayer from one soul to another. And he felt that he and the other soul were not strangers.

So, an hour later, Cyrus in his machine rose high above the earth and steered his course toward the spreading light in the East. Now it was a warmer tint, and growing rosier as it spread.

Guided only by the rising sun and by some subtle sense which he did not pretend to define, he sailed—or darted—over the waste of water between Cape Cod and Portugal. Far below him, on this deep blue ocean, specks were moving. Some were white; others darker, shedding smoke. But all moved so slowly, compared with himself, that they seemed at anchor. For, with him, any speed was possible and unfailing.

This was his first trip by daylight across the Atlantic. When out of sight of land, with the level, dark blue line of the horizon on every side, he began to have the same sensation as when flying through space; a sensation of aimless wandering. Also, there being no land marks, nothing by which to measure progress, he found his only way of gauging speed was by the amount of electric power he applied to his machine. He had, of course, the sun to go by: and

he knew the difference in time between Boston and Lisbon was about four hours. Six hours he had allowed for reaching Europe but he was startled by the rapidity with which the morning sun was sliding westward across the heavens. It helped him to guess at his velocity when he found the morning sun had become, somewhat suddenly, an afternoon sun, and was well behind him. Across the ocean he shot his machine, more like a cannon ball than a passenger craft. Over the first piece of land—which must be Spain—he hovered a few minutes for a hasty lunch; also for a supply of fresh air. His oxygen cylinder was so large and with such enormous pressure to the square foot that with the attendant apparatus for supplying breathable air it could keep him alive for several days. But now he took good long breaths of the outer air as a matter of both economy and luxury.

Then along the Northern end of the Mediterranean, still guided by Faith alone for the spot whence came the summons.

Now Cyrus, in his knowledge of geography, was about like the rest of us. He had learned it, but details were not fresh in his mind. The two great islands off to his right he guessed were Corsica and Sardina. Over Northern Italy he sped, where local showers were hiding, for a time, the land beneath. One city on the western coast, with its countless canals, was unmistakably Venice. On he sped across the upper end of the Adriatic—the narrow part. Here, as he approached the eastern shore, guidance forsook

him. He slowed his machine, then stopped. Thus far his intuition, whether right or wrong, had led him without wavering. Now, and suddenly, all guidance ceased—his intuition vanished. A sudden need, he felt, for knowledge he did not possess. A sense of helplessness came upon him, intensified, perhaps, by the reaction from his previous confidence. In fear of straying from his course he decided to alight. If fortune favored him the voice might come again, and he could start afresh. So he descended, slowly, toward the summit of a towering hill whose western sides were steep and thickly wooded.

He landed in a cypress grove, beside a garden.



XV

A GARDEN OF WONDERS

WHEN Cyrus stepped out of his machine he stood for a moment unsteady on his legs; a usual condition in a sudden change of air after hours of bewildering speed.

So far as he could judge he was in the grounds of an institution of some kind—a monastery, a college, a convent, or possibly a summer palace. Along the side of the garden overlooking the sea, which lay far below, ran a wall. On this wall at regular spaces stood statues of ecclesiastical persons, presumably Saints. They stood back to the sea, facing the garden. In the garden a fountain played. Off beyond the garden he saw long, white buildings, and a chapel. But what most impressed him was the beauty of a line of cloisters, their many arches of white marble, soft-

ened by age, now all aglow in the light of the western sun. But his wandering, enchanted eyes fell upon another sight, different in character, yet fully as interesting. But in a different way. So interesting that he forgot, for a moment, the garden, the fountain, the cloisters and the Saints. The sight that gently stirred him was the figure of a girl; a graceful figure that seemed a fitting climax to this garden in fairy land. She was leaning against the parapet, her face toward the sun, now sinking in the West. She seemed in deepest meditation. Her dress, a light gray, with white bands at the neck and shoulders, suggested a religious order. So he decided that his guess at having landed in a convent might be correct. He was not familiar with convents. The inmates, so far as he knew, might be a mingling of religious fanatics and female criminals partially reformed. He felt sure, however, up to the present moment, that they were wide and square in build, plain of face and haters of men. Hence his surprise at the alluring, girlish figure now before him. Perhaps this one was in here by mistake. Or, she might be some lovely victim of disappointed love. May be a human angel brutally treated by cruel relatives. Perhaps a marriageable princess escaping a distasteful alliance. But these were merely guesses. She was standing not far away, and was partly hidden from the convent buildings by the trunks of the ancient cypresses.

Cyrus approached this damsel. He saw that she was short, and slight of figure, distinctly *petite*, and

so absorbed in her own thoughts that she failed to hear his footsteps on the gravel walk.

He coughed. It seemed a safe if not original manner of announcing his presence. The girl turned and faced him. She was startled; and a hand went swiftly to her lips as if to suppress an exclamation. A short moment they stood regarding each other, a dozen feet apart, the light full in the face of the intruder, while the girl's was partly in shadow. For the descending sun was almost directly behind her. So earnestly she studied him that he became embarrassed. Her own surprise was so great that her lips parted, then closed again, as if her voice were lost in astonishment. She took a backward step and laid a hand on the parapet as if for support. As for Cyrus, this little person was easily the most entrancing vision of his experience. Slight, erect, with a dainty head and glorious eyes, she seemed a perfect and harmonious element with the radiant splendors in the West. Such eyes he had not beheld since he lived beneath the spell of the celestial windows of Ruth Heywood's soul. These present eyes, now opened wide in wonder, were trying to grapple with his presence, as with some visitors from another planet.

Cyrus bowed; his very best, most elaborate and ceremonious inclination. And Cyrus's bows were works of art.

Had he been attired in court costume, and swept the earth with a chapeau of ostrich plumes instead of a checkered golf cap, he would have eclipsed the Grand

Monarque in his own field. It was, of course, the same old salutation that had startled Longfields years ago.

Then he advanced a step. "Do you happen to speak English, madam?"

The girl hesitated a moment, then nodded.

Cyrus, delighted at the unexpected answer, took another step nearer—perhaps two or three. Joy was written in his face. His manner became, unconsciously, almost familiar.

"How fortunate! I am a stranger here. Can you tell me what place this is?"

As he moved nearer the parapet the girl had turned toward him until her face was more in the sunlight. In his own face admiration was clearly written. The girl lowered her eyes. But she made no answer.

He spoke again. "This certainly is not a hospital, is it?"

She moved her head, gently, in the negative.

"Is it the palace, or villa, of some King, or Prince or Duke—or something?"

Again the silent answer in the negative.

A chilling thought came to the traveler. Could this be a deaf and dumb asylum?

Now Cyrus had been "going on his nerves" for some hours and they might be more sensitive than usual. The last distressful thought showed plainly in his face. His heart began to bleed for this afflicted angel. And so pretty! So superlatively charming and desirable! As she raised the wondrous eyes and again

regarded him his one ambition, at the moment, was to avoid appearing too imbecile and clownish. And lo, he was both! Never had he felt so helpless. If he knew at least the sign language there might be hope for progress. Even in that field of expression all he could recall were the doings in the pantomimes: to shut the eyes and incline your head upon your hand for sleep; to wobble your jaw for terror, and to lick your lips and rub your stomach with a rotary motion when you wanted food. But this was no moment for comic things, when his own heart and the very air he breathed were all a quiver with high adventure, with Beauty and Romance. So he stood before her in a painful, and—it seemed to him—a foolish silence. He looked down, then away, then at her, and as his drowsy eyes rested on her face he thought he detected an effort to suppress a smile. This doubled his embarrassment. He tried vainly to discover in what manner his question was mirth provoking. However, he made a brave effort to assert himself—to appear as if nobody cared. So he smiled, and straightened up a little.

"If you speak English won't you please say something? Just tell me what kind of a place this is? Where I am?"

"Non entra no signori in questo giardino."

Cyrus knew those words were Italian, and that was all. He frowned in his endeavor to guess their meaning.

"I am sorry, but I don't understand. Won't you please say that in English?"

"I said you were in a place where men are not allowed."

In pronouncing English words it seemed another voice. And he had heard it before! His drowsy eyes opened wider, his lips parted, and for a moment he stared, in wonder, as if belief came hard. Was it the voice he had heard in the darkness—in the motor, that night? As he stood in dumb surprise, hoping for the best, the girl stepped forward with a smile and extended a hand.

"Ruth!" he exclaimed. "Oh, Ruth! Really, is it you?"

It was. And great joy was in the meeting. They told each other many things. He learned that after the death of her parents she had found a refuge here, in this convent, through the influence of a friend. And he, in turn, told of his father's sudden death, of his own doings, of the Great Discovery. But he made no mention of his present affluence. He could foresee her sorrow and her sympathy for a man, otherwise normal, who told of gathering diamonds on the moon.

Leaning against the parapet, and facing the golden sky across the water, they talked, forgetful of surroundings. So engrossing was this talk of other days that they lived again in Longfields.

From this Fairy Land of childhood Ruth was the first to return to earth. "You must go, Drowsy."

And she turned an anxious look toward the buildings beyond the garden.

"Oh, don't say that! Why, Ruth, this is the happiest moment of my life—a thousand times the happiest. Life has really begun again!"

"That is very polite of you, but——"

"Polite! Well, I should say! Why, Ruth, your very presence—just to look at you and hear your voice—is a—is a—breath of heaven. You are the loveliest thing I have ever seen. I can't express it!"

She laughed. "You are doing fairly well."

"Of course, you know it already, but truly, with no exaggeration, as you stand there now with that western sun for a side light you are the daintiest thing in Creation. And the same spell-binding eyes! Well, I knew that night in the dark that you were not a giantess—and that was about all."

She raised a hand for silence. "That will do, Drowsy. You have covered the ground."

But Cyrus went on. "And so angelic and pleasantly superior! Why, you are a temptation to any able-bodied lover to pick you up and run—or fly—away with you."

She blushed, frowned and laughed, all at the same time. "That will do! Now I know exactly what I am—and just how childish a man can be. I believe you are lighter headed than when you were a boy."

"I am telling the truth."

"Telling the truth! Then you have changed, indeed, for that was not your habit." In sudden alarm she

straightened up. "Oh, but you mustn't be seen here, Drowsy! You must go—at once!"

"Not now? Not this very minute?"

"Yes, this very minute. Men are not allowed here, under any circumstances. If I were found talking with you it would mean—oh, anything!"

"What does it matter? You are not going to stay here."

"Stay here? Of course I am!"

"But not long?"

"So long as I live."

"You don't mean that!"

"Why not? I expect to live and die here. We are all very happy and very thankful."

"You don't mean that you are not coming back to—to Longfields—to me? You don't really mean what you say? That you are going to stay here forever?"

"Certainly. Of course. Why not?"

"Then you have changed your mind since this morning—since yesterday."

She looked up into Cyrus's face, puzzled, and disturbed. "Changed my mind? What do you mean? I really don't understand."

"Are you pretending that you don't know why I am here?"

"Pretending!"

"Any other word that you prefer. Only tell me."

"Tell you what?"

"Do you mean to say that you don't know why I am here?"

"You came to see me, I suppose."

"And you had no idea I was coming?"

"Not the slightest. How could I? I never was more surprised. But it's a most welcome surprise."

Cyrus closed his eyes and drew a long breath as one who makes an effort at self control. "I ask just one thing, Ruth. Be honest with me."

"Be honest! Why, Cyrus, what *do* you mean? Indeed I can only guess at what's in your mind. You look as if you were angry. You have no right to be. Aren't you assuming——"

"Oh, don't! Don't do that! At least be frank. Why did you call me across the water? Just for the pleasure of doing this?"

"Call you? Across the water?"

There was touch of contempt in Cyrus's manner as he replied: "You don't even know what I mean?"

"On my honor I do not!"

"And you accuse me of not being truthful!"

"Drowsy, listen. This may be our last meeting. Let us not part in this spirit—through any misunderstanding. Our friendship is too precious for that, isn't it? I beg you, tell me what you mean by my calling you. When? How? Do you mean a letter?"

"I mean the message I received last night, and again early this morning. Through the air—by wireless as it were—in the old way, years ago, that I often got your messages."

"But I have sent you no message."

"Didn't you even think of me yesterday or this morning?"

"No, I did not. I have thought of you often, and of our old childhood attachment, but not yesterday nor this morning, nor for several days."

"Perhaps you remember," said Cyrus, speaking slowly, the slumbrous eyes looking earnestly down into Ruth's, "I used to get messages from you when we were far apart, even from your house to mine."

"Indeed I do! And it was most mysterious—almost uncanny."

"And they never deceived us?"

"No, never;—as I remember them."

"Well, it was the same sort of message I received last night. It came to me twice, and the meaning of the message was as clear as any spoken word. And to this spot it guided me."

He turned and looked about the grounds, beyond the trees and garden, toward the cloisters and the chapel. "Who but you could call me here?"

Ruth, also, looked toward the convent buildings. "Is it not possible your own brain may have played you a trick? Such things happen, you know."

"My brain has not played such tricks. So far it has never deceived me. To be honest I was not thinking of you at the time. Father's death had been almost my only thought for weeks."

"What more can I say, Drowsy? I am telling you the truth. And after all why should I call you? If

you are the faithful soul you pretend to be, why didn't you write me months ago?"

"How could I? I never had your address. And you promised—or almost promised—to let me have it. I waited, and waited, hoping for it—wondering in what way it was to come."

She frowned: then, with a solemn movement of the head:

"You did have it."

"I did have it! How on earth could I get it?"

"From Gertrude Page. I told her to mention a letter from me. Then, if you asked for my address, she would give it to you. But you didn't ask."

Vehemently he protested. "On my honor, Ruth, this is the first I have heard of it. She never spoke of any letter. And why should she, poor thing? For nearly a year she has been in the asylum at Worcester."

"You mean her—her mind is affected?"

"Yes;—sort of a nervous breakdown. And her memory gone."

"Oh, how dreadful!"

In the silence that followed, Ruth found the drowsy eyes looking deep into her own, as if reading her innermost thoughts. She recalled the singular power he had exercised as a boy—of seeing into other people's minds, apparently without effort, and answering questions before they were asked. At this present moment she had reasons for keeping her own thoughts to herself. She avoided his gaze, and looked away,

over the water, toward the west. Too late, it seemed, for he said, quietly:

"It would have been fairer to me if you had sent it."

"Sent what?"

"The second letter, the one you wrote to somebody else."

Ruth's little figure stiffened. Color flew to her cheeks, and there were signs of anger as she faced him.

"How do you know I wrote a second letter?"

Taken aback by this sudden change of manner, he hesitated, then he smiled, but with an obvious effort. And the smile was not of mirth. It was a smile of the joyless type, often employed to carry favor. "Why—I—er—I don't know exactly."

"Yes you do know. You pryed into my thoughts. It's your old trick. And a hateful habit."

"I am sorry, Ruth. I know it's a hateful habit."

"Then why do you do it?"

"I don't do it. I didn't mean to do it then. It's not a habit any more. Years ago I gave it up. But now, I was so anxious, so very anxious to know your real thoughts—to know if you really had no love for me at all—that I couldn't resist. I swear I will not do it again. Truly I almost never do it. But now, at the critical moment of my life, when it's a matter of life or death, the temptation was too great."

"It's an exasperating, dishonorable trick, and I don't like it."

"I am sorry, Ruth. Please forgive me."

"And you are very much mistaken if you think any woman with a particle of pride is going to marry a man who can spy into her secret thoughts—and merely by staring at her."

Her eyes still avoided him. She looked over the garden, toward the cloisters, anywhere except at his face. When she spoke again, however, there was more sympathy in her voice. "But that doesn't matter. It has always been my intention to remain here."

"You don't really mean it?"

"Indeed I do! It is no sudden decision. I am very happy here."

He turned partly away, and said nothing. She glanced at his face, and its expression would have softened the Rock of Ages. There was no doubt of his sincerity; nor of his silent agony beneath the blow he had just received. No words were uttered. He simply stood and gazed—at nothing.

Across the garden, from the open windows of the central building, came the sound of a harp. It came faintly, a gentle, plaintive melody, all in harmony with the murmur of the fountain, the fading glories in the west—and an aching heart. The voice of the harp may have had its effect on Ruth. As she looked up at the face of Cyrus, with its misery, she began to feel the old-time sympathy of their childhood; the long forgotten sense of responsibility for his welfare when she was mother and sister to him, with the woman's love he had missed as a boy; also his chosen

pal;—his adored and trusted playmate. She felt again the yearning to keep him out of trouble. His distress brought an almost equal suffering to herself. But when he turned his eyes again to her face she was—apparently—still studying the cloisters.

“Is this really the end?” He spoke in a lower, unsteady voice. “Do you really mean that our boy and girl days, our old affection, all those memories—and you don’t know how much they have meant to me—always, always—through everything—you don’t really mean—all that is—is just—nothing? That I am no more to you than anybody else?”

The heart in Ruth’s little body beat so loud—it seemed to her—that a man could hear it. She tried hard to blink away the moisture in her eyes as they rested on various objects, but not on the face of Cyrus. “You will get over it, Drowsy. I feel it, in another way, as much as you do. Please don’t talk about it. And you really must go. A man’s presence here—and alone with me—would be very hard to explain. Please go—for my sake!”

Cyrus closed his eyes and drew a hand, slowly, across his forehead. Then, instead of the protest she expected, he straightened up in a sudden agitation, laid his hand on her arm and pointed toward the convent buildings.

The voice of a woman, singing, came floating across the silent garden.

“What is that?” he whispered.

Also in a lower tone Ruth answered: “That is

Sister Francesca, singing. She has a heavenly voice."

"What is she singing?"

"An old Hungarian song. A mother's prayer for her child. She often sings it. And nothing could be more beautiful."

"Sister Francesca!" he exclaimed, but in a solemn whisper. He remembered his father's dying words.

"A famous singer," Ruth explained. "All the world has heard of her. She was never a mother but she sings this song with all the feeling and the——"

He did not hear the end of the sentence. He had started in the direction of the song, across the garden.

"Stop! Stop! Cyrus, stop. You don't know what you are doing!"

But he paid no attention. Again she called. She entreated, then commanded. Still he paid no attention. And he walked so fast that she stopped and stood still in helpless terror. She could only guess at what this humiliating misadventure might signify to the other sisters. On second thought she followed, but with the courage of despair. The catastrophe was at hand, and she would face it. As for Cyrus, he heard her not. He heard only the song. He heard only the woman singing—the voice and the song that had come to him beneath the stars, at Longfields!

At last he stopped. And when he stopped he was standing upon a stone terrace, where high arched windows reached the floor, their heavy casements now wide open.

There he stood, and listened.

Although a lover of music, and keenly sensitive to its charm, this prayer affected him beyond any other song. Its pathos, with the divine voice that had thrilled the world, reached deeper than his emotions. Into his very soul it sank. It seemed to open the doors of memory—the memory of things long forgotten; things almost of another life.

Under a spell he listened, and the spell was intensified by the scene about him,—an enchanted garden high above the world. Against the gold and crimson in the West stood the statues at the garden's edge, their purple shadows reaching almost to the terrace. With the warm, soft light that enveloped all things came a peace and a beauty that were more of paradise than of earth. And, as if to complete the illusion of the upper realms, the voice of the singer seemed to lift him yet further from the world of common things. Between this voice and his spiritual self came a new born harmony. It came to him as a message between two hearts, wafted across a gulf of years. The message it brought was intimate, for him alone. To the voice itself, a tendril of love, all the chords of his own heart were vibrating. Some mysterious power re-awakened elusive but imperishable bonds between itself and him.

He closed his eyes, shut out the world about him, and his soul and the soul of the singer were one.



XVI

THE SOUL OF A SONG

WITHIN, at one side of the room, a group of forty sisters, more or less, sat listening to the song. The room was spacious. Against its white walls hung various paintings by old masters. The further wall, facing the western windows, was partly covered by an enormous tapestry representing Esther and her handmaidens before King Ahasuerus. The king was on a throne, amid the splendors of his court. Now, at this hour, its colors were all aglow at the touch of the sinking sun. Between the three long windows stood growing plants in massive pots of Siena marble.

Across the room, facing the sisters, stood Madame Francesca; and, not far away, the accompanist with her harp.

The various members of the little audience were

affected by the song in different ways and in different degree, according to temperament. Some, enraptured by her voice and art, leaned forward in æsthetic joy. Others, with moister eyes and quicker breath, gave out their hearts to the deeper meaning of the song. Madame Drusilla, an older woman whose two young sons had fallen in the war, sat always, on these occasions, with head bent low, her face in her hands. But all the others kept their eyes upon the singer. For the personality of Madame Francesca—as she wished to be called since her retirement from the world—possessed in itself an irresistible charm. Now, standing in her light gray uniform, in the flood of golden light from the great windows, she seemed transfigured—a celestial being from another sphere.

The song itself was the outpouring of a mother's love. And it was rendered with a pathos, a beauty and a depth of feeling that stirred the heart of every listener. It seemed to the sisters a marvel of dramatic art that a woman, however great an artist, could so touch the hearts of others when not herself a mother. And they marveled that a woman whose physicians forbade excitement could so move an audience and not be overwhelmed herself by emotion.

The song ended. As the fingers of the harpist moved gently across the strings, in the last notes of the accompaniment, Madame Francesca stood for a moment with closed eyes. Her breathing and the color in her cheeks showed a degree of feeling which Sister Lucrezia, the physician, did not approve.

Then came a climax to the song—a climax far transcending any singer's art. In this short, somewhat solemn silence that followed the song, there appeared in one of the long windows that opened to the floor, a figure rarely seen within the convent walls. It was a man. And the man was neither workman, priest, grand duke or king. Neither was he old. Men visitors were rare, and the few that entered were usually middle aged or churchly. This visitor was young, hatless, his hair in disorder. He wore a checkered suit and leather leggins, and he was in no way ecclesiastical. His manner was eager,—somewhat excited, with eyes fixed earnestly on Sister Francesca. He paid no attention to the other sisters. If such a thing was possible he was ignorant of their presence. As for the sisters they were too surprised to speak, or move. They merely sat and stared.

Cyrus stepped within, slowly, as in a trance. Slowly he advanced toward Madame Francesca. She, as surprised as any of the others, regarded him in silence until he stopped before her. As they stood facing each other, the western light on both their faces, the spectators—including Ruth, now at the open window—began to marvel. Fear began to mingle with surprise, for many in the audience knew that famous beauties could be tormented by crazy lovers. But fear, in turn, gave way to wonder, for it proved a strange interview, never forgotten by those who saw it. No words were spoken. No words were needed. In the eyes that looked into his own Cyrus read their greeting as

clearly as in an open book. And she, as clearly, looked deep into his heart—as she had looked into the heart of his father. Now in his responsive, eager face she saw the confirmation of his father's letters, that she had bequeathed to her child her own extraordinary faculty. It brought a sudden joy, this assurance of a perfect understanding. Each received, in full, the other's message. In the face of Cyrus—with his grandfather's drowsy eyes—she saw his happiness in this meeting. He was telling her in unspoken words of his childhood yearnings; how he had thought and dreamed of her from early boyhood; that he had prayed and hoped for this meeting. And now—here, had come the fulfillment of all his dreams, his hopes, his prayers! And he, as he fathomed to their secret depths the tragic but tender eyes, found love and a heart-expanding welcome.

The little audience, however, saw nothing but the outward, silent greetings. To them was not revealed the greater happiness, the imperishable bond.

But this silent meeting, with its overwhelming joy, was the prelude to the drama—its silent overture. The curtain had risen on the Diva's final triumph, the Immortal Opera with its happy ending.

To the amazement of the audience she drew the young man's face to hers and kissed him on either cheek. Then, overcome by emotion, as it seemed, her head fell slowly forward on his breast. Without his supporting arms she would have sunk to the floor. The sisters saw, and hastened to her side. Cyrus, with

their help, carried the fainting figure to a nearby bench, where they laid her, with a cushion beneath her head. Sister Lucrezia, the physician, bent anxiously over the unconscious form. And so sudden was it all that her hearers could hardly believe her when at last she arose, and solemnly announced that the spirit of Madame Francesca had risen to another life.

She spoke in Italian but Cyrus knew its meaning. His head drooped and he stood motionless, crushed, as if his own spirit and that of the sleeping figure on the bench were still together.

It was the Diva's long sleep. The last notes of her enchanting voice had died away; the curtain was down, the orchestra gone, the lights out. The audience had vanished. No more in the empty house would be heard the clapping of hands, the cries of enthusiasm, the *bravos* and *encores*.

But there are memories that never die. And now, to those who looked upon the tranquil face, it seemed as if memories of conquest and of triumph—or of something higher—still lingered in her heart. For the face was more than peaceful. There was a smile upon the lips that bore witness to a perfect contentment beyond the touch of death.

Cyrus was recalled to himself by the voice of the Mother Superior, a tall, gray-haired, kind-faced woman. She approached him, and in a voice of sym-

pathy addressed him, in Italian. He understood the meaning of the message; that she shared his grief, but the presence of men was forbidden; the rules were strict, and she begged him to go. He expressed his gratitude by a respectful inclination and a few words in English. Then he walked over to the silent figure. Upon her folded hands he laid one of his own and stood, for a moment, looking down upon the face. The rosy light from the western sky seemed to bring the flush of life to the Diva's cheeks. He knelt beside the bench. Reverently he touched his lips to the sleeper's forehead.

He arose and moved toward the terrace. Near the window he stopped, and to the watching sisters he bowed. In this obeisance he told his sorrow and his profound respect. Then he turned and went out as he came.

The Mother Superior, still apprehensive, asked Ruth to accompany him to the gates and make sure of his departure. But Cyrus did not walk toward the gates. He walked toward the spot where he and Ruth had met, then beyond among the trees. During this walk neither spoke. As Cyrus was obviously in deepest sorrow Ruth refrained from words. Absorbed in her own thoughts, she suddenly realized that she was approaching an unfamiliar object. This unfamiliar object, a thing about twenty feet in length and a little taller than a man, might pass for some unknown monster of the deep, or a minor whale. It seemed to be of iron with a trap-door in the side

just large enough for a man to climb within. Its color was a dull gray.

"Look!" she exclaimed. "What on earth is that?"

"My flying machine. That is what I came in."

"You came in that?"

As she looked up at him he nodded, slowly, and made no other reply. The light was fading, but she could see that a change had come into his face since they stood together at the garden wall. This new expression showed a side of his character that she had forgotten. She now remembered that it was the same look that had come into his face when he vanquished the Tormentor in the Unitarian Church, years ago; when the good natured, easy going boy became, of a sudden, a reckless gladiator, the fearless defender who fights—and dies, if needed—for a sacred cause; his God, his Country, or—on that occasion—for his girl. It told deep emotions, of strength of purpose and the courage that has no respect for obstacles. Yet the slumbrous eyes were friendly as he said:

"Come, Ruth. Come home with me. I will make you happier than you will ever be in this place."

"No, Cyrus. No. I cannot."

"Do you mean that you will stay here all your life, from a sense of duty?"

"No—not wholly. Oh, why begin all over again? Please be reasonable, Drowsy. Please go away quietly."

His voice was gentle, but there was something in

his face that recalled the boy of long ago, the boy who vanquished giants. Now it was the man—who might defy the gods. She was afraid:—of what, she knew not. But she took a backward step, a hand to her breast as if to calm a nervous heart. There was reason to be afraid. For then happened the unforgivable thing—doubly unforgivable when applied to a woman of sensibility and pride. He bent forward, to pick up something at her feet, she thought. Then, without warning, and all too sudden for escape, she felt an arm behind her knees, another across her back, and she was lifted from the ground. Before she could protest, or even struggle, he pushed open the door of the iron monster with his foot and passed her within as if she were a child. Gently he placed her on the floor and climbed in himself. She found herself sitting in front of him, her shoulders held firmly between his knees. He shut the little door at his side and all was dark. A button was pressed, one or two small levers manipulated, then a buzzing sound, a slight quivering of the car and through the port hole in front she saw that they were rising above the tops of the trees.

Then, high into the air.



XVII

"I MEAN IT"

SIX hundred miles an hour, to old-time travelers, might seem fast. High up in the air, however, some miles above the earth with nothing beneath but the Atlantic Ocean, it seems a moderate pace. There are none of the usual landmarks to gauge one's speed; no telegraph poles, houses, or towns. The few ships one passes, seen far below, are movable objects with no definite relation to your own progress. Also, in a practically air tight conveyance no wind can beat against your face.

While three hours may seem brief for a transatlantic passage it must be remembered that the time Cyrus lost in going Eastward he gained in going West. The surface of our little earth moves eastward about a thousand miles an hour; so, with North America rush-

ing forward to meet him he could easily make the journey of five thousand miles and more in the four hours, and almost without hurrying. There is a startling difference in celerity between an automobile and a yoke of oxen; more still between a steamship and a cannon-ball: and Cyrus' device was capable of any speed that he dared to travel. The only delays were in starting off, and in approaching his own Coast. Once above Massachusetts, however, he could easily find Longfields. The landmarks were familiar.

During this journey very little conversation took place between his passenger and himself. Sitting on the floor in front of him, her shoulders between his knees, he could not see her face. She made no acknowledgment of his speeches and gave no answer to any questions. He was correct in his belief that she was both alarmed and angry. But he did not know at the time that her anger far exceeded her alarm. This he realized, however, when he helped her from the car at the door of her aunt's house in Longfields.

For a moment she leaned against the door, weak, trembling, dazed, her hair disarranged, her cheeks hot. No words had been spoken during the last two hours. This long silence he was the first to break.

"You will forgive me, Ruth, won't you?"

It was too dark to see each other's faces, but this time had her eyes met his there would be nothing to conceal. Her anger and her dislike were deep and sincere. She answered in a low tone, but the tone and

manner revealed a repugnance of whose existence there could be no doubt.

"Do not speak to me again; ever. Do you hear?"

"Yes, I hear."

"I mean it."

With a quivering hand she turned the knob, entered the house and shut the door behind her.

That Ruth meant all she said was soon made clear to Cyrus—very clear indeed. Two days later—after giving her time to recover—he came to her aunt's house with a little bouquet of flowers, hopefully gathered by his own hands in his own garden. With it was a note, an eloquent little plea for forgiveness, so humble and so sincere as to soften a heart of granite. He knocked at the front door, and waited. At last—it might have been a year that he waited—the door was opened.

"Good morning, Stella."

"Good morning, Cyrus."

Stella was the daughter of Abner Phillips, the harness maker, and she and Ruth and Cyrus had been playmates together in the old days at the red school house. The little harness business had suffered—even more than other things—with the decline of Longfields, and had finally expired. Stella had been out at service for the last few years. She was an angular maiden with thin lips and sharp eyes.

"Will you please take this note and the flowers to Ruth, Stella, and ask if I can see her?"

"Yes, of course, won't you come in?"

"No, thank you. I'll just wait here."

On the doorstep he waited, but not long; Stella quickly returned with the note and the flowers.

She seemed embarrassed. "Ruth says she—she——"

"Out with it, Stella."

"She says she won't see you."

"Won't see me! Is that just what she said?"

The maiden hesitated. As a friend of both and strictly neutral, her position was awkward.

"Why—yes."

"Just what did she say, Stella?"

"She said, give him back his flowers and his note and tell him not to come again."

This was clear to the dullest lover. And the words cut deeper still as he saw in the face of the sharp eyed ambassadress an impressible gleam of pity—or exultation—he could not tell which. Cyrus blushed like a girl. For a moment his drowsy eyes gazed blindly at Stella, then at the flowers and the note as if trying to realize what had happened. The effort was painful. The flowers seemed to be jubilant in their gayety, and jeering at him. He had believed, until this moment, that he was prepared for the worst. He had also believed, from his knowledge of women in history and fiction that they changed their minds with ease—in short, that honest lovers never need despair. This blow seemed to paralyze his senses. But Pride came to his rescue. It made him realize the degradation of appearing a fool before Stella. So,

collecting his scattered wits he raised his head and smiled upon the waiting maiden. There was a quivering of the lip, however, as he said in a manner laboriously offhand—and, of course, unsuccessful:

“Oh, well, I must try again. Thank you, Stella. Good-by.”

As he reached the gate she saw him toss the flowers to the ground.

His state of mind as he walked blindly along the village street, beneath the arching elms, could not be described in articulate language. Sorrow, anger, humiliation, all struggled for control. Resignation was not among them. So Ruth was really in earnest. If she hated and despised him, why live? This tumult within, while it numbed his senses—and might lead to tragedy—provided mirth for others. Just in front of the store a group of children ran across his path. They were followed, slowly, by a large Newfoundland dog, a well-known character in the village. He officiated, as is customary among dogs, as guardian and boon companion to children, all of whom he loved. His name was Major. He belonged to little Jason Howard, but he was on terms of intimacy with every child in Longfields. Major happened to stroll across the sidewalk just in front of Cyrus. The discarded lover, blind to outward things, collided with him. Always a gentleman and never forgetting his manners, Cyrus stopped, and—Ruth being the only thing in his mind—he raised his cap and bowed politely.

"I beg your pardon. It was my fault. Excuse me."

And all with a sober face. The children laughed, supposing Cyrus was being funny for their amusement. But never in his life had Cyrus felt less like being funny. Soberly he walked away not even hearing their laughter.

After this interview with Major he at once relapsed into the Cañon of Despair. For his was the agony of a man of honor who feels he has committed a disgraceful act, and has lost, for all time, the respect and good opinion of the being whose affection he valued above all other things.

It seemed but a moment after leaving Major that he found himself standing before two women and saying "how do you do"—or something equally significant. With a mighty effort to ignore the past—and the future—he recognized the two elderly maidens as Miss Fidelia Allen and Miss Anita Clement. They had stopped and were passing the time of day with him. He realized, blindly, that Miss Clement had opened a book and was telling him about it. Miss Clement had the faculty of expressing a barren idea in a wealth of language. So, while the listener's drowsy—and now dreaming—eyes rested on the speaker's lips he was seeing, not Miss Clement's face, but a face more threatening, yet of greater interest. As to the effect of Miss Clement's well chosen words on the listener's far away mind, the sound from her lips might have been the murmuring of pines. And

as for The Only Woman in the world, if other women had changed their minds why not this one? He recalled the look in her eyes when——

"Do tell us what you think of it—just how you feel about it, Cyrus?"

As the wild horse of the prairies is suddenly jerked to earth by a lasso, so came back Cyrus.

"Oh—oh—very well, indeed, thank you. Never better."

"I meant about this new thought from the Orient. Just how deeply it impresses you. Just where, among the great thinkers, you would place Rub-a Shah Lagore."

"That's it exactly! Rubbish galore! Couldn't express it better. Somebody described all that stuff as transcendental flim-flam." And he smiled his most winning smile—a smile of sympathy, of fine intelligence and a lively interest in the conversation.

But Miss Clement stiffened a little, and frowned. "Do you feel that way?"

"Possibly you don't know Rub-a Shah Lagore," said Miss Fidelia, more gently.

"Know him? Oh, yes," said Cyrus. "I know him. That is, I think I met him. Was it in Cambridge?"

"I doubt it," said Miss Clement, "as he died about fifteen hundred."

"Fifteen hundred!" Cyrus smiled, nodded and tried to appear at ease. "Still I may have met him in a previous incarnation."

Then, apropos of incarnations, Miss Clement dis-

coursed on the Oriental mind, on matters psychic, philosophic, mystic and occult. And as she talked, and drifted hither and thither on a sea of words, Cyrus floated off in his own direction, and was recalling once again the look in Ruth's eyes—that mingling of anger and contempt when Miss Clement again suddenly brought him back to the village street.

“Don't you think so yourself?”

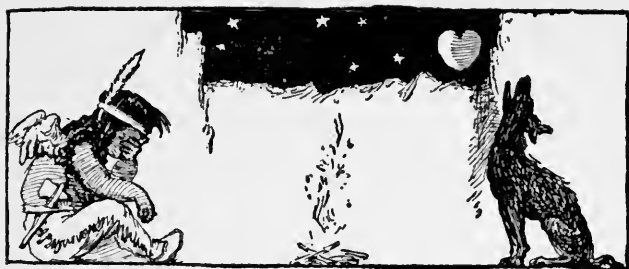
Cyrus pulled himself together. “Er—well—perhaps I don't quite understand you.”

“Do you know of any richer period in human thought? Any greater age?”

“Any greater age? No, certainly not. You mean fifteen hundred years? It certainly beats all records. That is, of course, all human records. Elephants, parrots and turtles, I believe, live to a green old age, but nothing like——”

Just what happened after that Cyrus did not remember. He found himself walking home with clear memories of Ruth, intermingled with blurred but painful impressions of two maiden ladies, frowning in surprise and annoyance as they said good-by and turned away.

Of one thing only was he certain: that in the utterance of senseless words he had surpassed all previous records, ancient or modern.



XVIII

THE CAÑON OF DESPAIR

AS to human wisdom, the best that can be said is that some of us are less crazy than others. Also, that the habitually foolish person, he who is foolish by preference—or by unalterable Fate—is less disturbing than your usually sensible friend who suddenly becomes fatuous.

This was realized by Joanna during the next few days. Cyrus caused her serious alarm. On his new and larger air craft he worked with such feverish haste that he forgot to eat or go to bed until reminded of those habits. In the matter of eating he seemed to have lost all memory as to when or how to do it. He poured tea instead of maple syrup on his rice cakes; he recognized no difference in flavor between salt and powdered sugar, marmalade or mustard. Joanna's strawberry shortcake, the very best in the

world—and his favorite dish—he regarded with unseeing eyes and forgot to eat it. His reply to nearly all her demands for information on whatever subject, was a smiling “Certainly, of course.”

But these were trifles. In his cup of bitterness there still were dregs: and sleepless Fate had not forgotten them. The cup was to be emptied. Late one afternoon, three days after the rebuff to his note, his flowers and himself, he was returning from Springfield alone in his motor. About a mile from Longfields, where the road ran through some woods, he saw a figure on ahead, walking toward the village. It was a female figure, short, slight, erect, and moving with a light and rather jaunty step. It wore a continental hat, a white shirt waist and a white skirt. He recognized this person at first glance, ran his car ahead of her a short distance, then stopped at the side of the road, got out and walked back to meet her. This time there was no elaborate salutation *à la Grande Monarch*. It was a simple raising of his cap and a tentative, humble minded greeting.

“Good day, Ruth.”

“Good day, Cyrus.”

She smiled, but the smile brought no sunshine to his heart; a perfunctory smile of duty and good manners, such as might have greeted any other human animal. And as she stood there, against the dark background of the woods, calm, cold, beautiful, and oh! so far away!—he saw aversion in her face and in every line of the rigid little figure.

In a low, uncertain voice he spoke. "So you will never forgive me?"

For a moment she looked away, beyond him, along the road toward the village. "I forgive you a great deal. I forgive your taking me by force and against my will from a welcome refuge where I was looking forward to a peaceful, happy life. But the greater wrong you have done me, the irreparable injury—that is harder to forgive."

"Irreparable injury? What do you mean, Ruth?"

Her eyebrows went up. "Indeed! You really do not know what I mean?"

"On my honor I do not."

"I mean my reputation—the loss of my good name."

"Oh, Ruth! Why you—oh—don't say that!"

Calmly, but with an obvious effort at self control she answered:

"Do you think there is no gossip in Longfields, no comment on my unexpected arrival? Do you think an unmarried woman can travel about the world alone with a young man as I did, and keep her good name?"

"I never thought of it—in that way. On my honor—I did not."

"Do you know of any other respectable young woman of your acquaintance who has done anything like it?"

"But it was all my doing. You couldn't help it. Don't they all know that?"

"No. Why should they know it? Will they believe that you, whom they have known from boyhood,

whom they respect and like, would carry me off by force, entirely against my will?" Then with a bitter little laugh: "Oh, no! They are not so simple! And some woman has started a story that we——" Her face became crimson and she covered it for a moment with her hands—"Oh, I can't bear to think of it."

Cyrus closed his eyes. His head drooped. "I never thought of all that. I was stupid. I can see it now. I don't blame you for hating me."

Ruth went on, speaking with nervous haste. "A pleasanter bit of scandal never happened in this village. I could not bear to live here. It would kill me to live here."

"You are not going away!"

"Indeed I am!"

"Where?"

"To Worcester, to earn my living as a nurse."

"Listen, Ruth. Let me do something, no matter what. Let me take you, or send you back to the Convent."

"The Convent! The Convent!" she repeated, and her cheeks reddened. "Do you think the Convent a refuge for women who leave it as I did?—for women who elope with—oh! It's for better women than that! They would never allow me within its gates."

"Then let me atone in some way."

"Indeed! And how?"

"In any way you say—there's all my money—take some of it—all of it. Not as a gift, but in some business way. Let me buy something at a——"

"Clever thought! Regild my reputation with Cyrus Alton's money!"

"Then marry me. Be my wife, only in name. I swear to you—I—will never see you if you wish it. Or—or trouble you in any way. Only let me do something. I had no idea of—of what—of what all this meant to you."

"Your wife!" she laughed a scornful, tragic, broken-hearted little laugh. "Never in this world. Never! Never that!"

She turned and walked away.

He walked beside her. "Please listen. I will do anything you say. I know I deserve it all, but that afternoon at the convent I was not myself. After what happened I was all wrought up. My brain——"

She stopped, turned about and faced him.

"Yes, there is one thing you can do. Leave me now. And let us not be seen together again—ever."

For a brief moment they stood confronting each other. And Cyrus looked deep into the eyes that once had been his guiding stars; the friendly eyes in whose depths his boy heart had sought—and never in vain—encouragement, or consolation. Now, he was finding in their contemptuous beauty only the cold ashes of their childhood devotion.

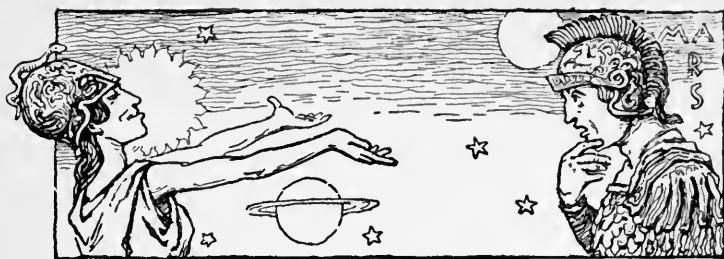
Then, once more, she turned her back upon him. Erect and with decisive steps, the little figure departed. He stood watching her as she walked—walking out of his life. In his brain and in his heart was a numbing

pain—the knowledge that his highest hopes were dead—killed, and by himself!

There and there he made a decision, a decision of vital import to himself. And why not? Who in the world, except Joanna would mourn, or even miss him? If there be such a thing as consolation when hope is dead, he found it in a great resolve.

As he passed her in his car he raised his cap and murmured

"Morituri te salutamus."



XIX

A YOUNG MAN TALKS

RUTH was in earnest when she told Cyrus of her intention to become a nurse. Some experience in that line, while in Europe, had fitted her for the work and she found little difficulty in securing a position in a Worcester Hospital. Possibly her prepossessing appearance was a help. The Superintendent, being human, was not immune, perhaps, to the influence of an interesting personality, especially in combination with an attractive face and voice and figure.

After this interview at the hospital, about the middle of the day, she took a return train for Springfield.

When she entered the car at the Worcester Station, and found a vacant seat, she gave no special attention to the two men in the seat just behind her

own. She merely noticed that the carefully dressed young man nearest the aisle had an intelligent wide awake face, and that his companion—next the window—was suffering from a cold in the head of aggravated dimensions. His aqueous eyes and swollen nose, his sneezes and his busy handkerchief told the familiar and unromantic drama of a mucous membrane at war with its owner.

The weather this day—a week or so after the interview with Cyrus—was cloudy, damp and otherwise depressing. She felt, of course, gratification in the success of her mission at the hospital. Her thoughts, however, were not entirely rosy as she looked from the car window on this homeward journey, gazing absently on the sunless landscape. She had much to think about, and often, during this little journey from Worcester she tried vainly to escape from unwelcome memories. At the mention of a familiar name, however, these wandering thoughts were centered suddenly on the conversation of the two men in the seat behind her.

“Alton, Cyrus Alton. Guess you’ve met him.”

“Yez, I thig zo. Kide of sleeby eyes, hasn’d he?”

“Yep. His eyes are sleepy, but, gee whiz! He does things.”

“Whad thigs?”

“Oh, anything—if it’s impossible.”

“Didn’d he bake a lod of bunny all of a zudden?”

“Bet your life he did! Made it while you wait.”

“How budge?”

"God knows."

"How did he do id?"

"God knows that too:—He and Alton. You can hear anything. Some say a rich widow, others, a pirate's cave. Perhaps it's just a friendly tip from his Partner."

"Who is his bardner?"

"The Almighty."

"You bead he is bious?"

"Nixy not! He's a scientist, and science and piety don't seem to cuddle much. He has discovered—or his Big Partner has told him—some secret of electricity that is just the humpingest thing out of jail. It's going to revolutionize the whole human outfit; business, travel, transportation. As to little things like manufactures in peace and wholesale destruction in war, why, we've got to begin all over again. You just can't digest it. And it's so simple that you laugh when you think of it."

"Doe! Really?"

"Yep; that's no exaggeration."

"Thad's inderesdig. I have heard vague rubers aboud id bud nothing like thad. Just whad is id?"

"Just what is it. Well, that's an easy question to ask. When he blabs his secret then we'll all know. But he says it's so simple that it's sure to be discovered some day."

"I spoze you doe him breddy well."

"Yep, in a way. He orders his electric stuff through us. A year ago when he was so poor he used to foot

it to save trolley fare the boss trusted him for twelve hundreds dollars' worth of radium."

"Good for the boss! He was a zpod. Did he ever get his bunny bag?"

"Twice over. Oh, Alton didn't forget it. He's as straight as a string."

"Well, he bay be all ride in sub ways bud he busd be jusb about grazy to sdard on thad jourdy."

"Oh, I dunno. He has done some big stunts already. And he's pretty level headed."

"Yez, bud id seebs like suizide to be. How var away is Bars, eddyway?"

"Oh, just a step. I believe the astronomers call it about forty-eight millions of miles."

"Vorty-eight billions of biles? Whew!"

"No, forty-eight millions—not billions."

The Rose Cold tried to laugh. "Yez I doe id iz—but with thiz invernal drouble I gan'd prodounce by ebs."

"Of course; beg your pardon."

"Thad's all ride. But dell be, is he really goig to dry vor id?"

"Sure thing. He may have started already."

Here both men noticed in a careless way, a movement of the shoulders of the girl in front of them when a hand went nervously to her face. And it so happened that the Rose Cold's next words were the expression of her own thoughts when he said:

"The bad's a vool!"

"No," said the younger man; "he's not a fool. He

has done a lot of figuring over it,—and experimenting. You see his machine is too good to be true. It can shoot through space at the same rate as electric waves, or waves of light."

"And how vasd is thad?"

"About a hundred and eighty thousand miles a second."

"Doe!"

"Yep."

"And you really believe id?"

"Sure."

"Id's sibly imbossible."

"I don't blame you for thinking so. But that's just why Alton likes it. If it was possible it wouldn't interest him. Miracles are his daily food. Gad, he's a wonder!"

"A hundred and eighty thouzand biles a zegond! Doe—thad's doo buch vor bee."

"No wonder you don't believe it. It surely is going some. Beats oxen."

"Aboutd how log would id taig him to ged there ad thad rade?"

Here came a silence while the younger man did some figuring. "About five seconds. But of course no human being, even in an air-tight cylinder, could keep his head—or anything else, at that rate. He allows about twelve hours to get there."

"Dwelve hours! Vorty-eight billion biles in twelve hours! Why zo zlow?"

"Well, he's got to go slow through the six or seven

miles of our atmosphere. Then, he doesn't know what sort of atmosphere surrounds Mars. So that'll take time like entering an unknown harbor. To be really safe he'll have to jog along slowly—on an average of four or five million miles an hour."

The Rose Cold laughed. "Beads vairy dales, doesn'd id?"

"To a frazzle."

"But the bravest bad in the world gan'd go all day without breathig."

"True enough. But Alton has the same system of oxygen cylinders as the U-boats—only better. More condensed and lasts longer. Uses same air more times without deteriorating."

"Well, whadever habbens, he busd be glever."

"Clever! He beats the devil."

"Will he ever gum bag, Jibby?"

"Dunno."

"I subbose the gradest danger is in being hid by a medeoride. I understand those rogs are always shoodig about in spaze."

"Yep; and all the way in size from a liver pill to a state house. But that isn't what'll knock him out."

"Berhabs dod, bud I shouldn'd gare do be there iv one habbened to hid him."

"Right you are. He'd have about as much show as a bottle of ginger ale colliding with a locomotive. But astronomers say they are not so very numerous. What he's most afraid of himself is some sudden electric disturbance in his own machine that will put his own

nervous system out of commission. You see nobody really knows what is going on in space. And if his nerves or lungs or brain go back on him, in anyway—Ping!—he's a goner."

After a pause the Rose Cold spoke in a more serious tone.

"Well, I taig off my had to him. It's a big thig, thad zord of gourage."

"I should say! And he knows himself there isn't one chance in a hundred of his ever touching this little earth again."

Here the attention of both men was drawn to the girls in front of them, who suddenly started from her seat—with both hands pressed hard against her face. She stood for a moment as if in pain, or under some mental disturbance. Then, sinking back into her seat, she appeared to be looking quietly out of the window during the short remainder of the journey. Although her action caused them no further interest, nor curiosity, it served to divert their talk from Cyrus Alton—a subject apparently exhausted—to other matters of no interest to Ruth Heywood.



XX

ANOTHER MESSAGE

WHEN Ruth left the train and took the stage for Longfields her spirit was in revolt—in revolt against herself, against Cyrus and against the progress of the vehicle. But any vehicle, however fast, would have been too slow on that afternoon. She left the conveyance at Cyrus Alton's driveway. This was her first visit to the Alton's home since her sudden departure, so many years ago. And now, as she walked toward the house, almost every foot of ground, every object in the spacious yard, the old maples and the house itself, seemed accusing her of treason and of heartless murder. From every side, however, came pleasant memories of bygone days,—like flowers in a forsaken garden. And all of Cyrus! Never was a yard so full of history. And now that

Cyrus was gone—gone forever, driven from the world by her own cruelty,—her over sensitive spirit writhed beneath the stings of conscience. Every recollection seemed to increase her guilt. Hardest to bear, in all this vista of the past, was the clear, undying fact that the cherubic, sleepy eyed little boy always stood between herself and trouble.

These memories overwhelmed her. There was the old maple in whose shade she and Drowsy played keeping house. They pretended Zac was President of the United States who had dropped in for dinner. Only ginger bread and sour grapes were served and Drowsy gave her the biggest half of the gingerbread because she, also, was a guest. Zac, always loyal, ate one or two of the green grapes just because Cyrus did. And the stone wall that saved their lives;—at least, she thought so when Mr. Randall's horse came snorting toward them across the field, on the other side. He seemed close at their heels when Cyrus boosted her up and pushed her over before he climbed up himself. He pushed so hard—against that part of the body on which we sit—that she landed on her face, and the short, stiff blades of grass that had just been mowed, cut the inside of her nose. She tried to smile as she remembered, with a gulp, that although he was badly scared himself he was the last to climb over the wall. Yes, he always gave her first chance at everything—in peace or war!

And there the well, where she and Susie Jordan had a quarrel one Sunday after Church, and Susie threw

a dipperful of water on Ruth's head. It spoiled her new hat and she burst into tears. Then Cyrus walked up to Susie—Ruth could see him now as if it were yesterday—made one of his lowest bows, as if to apologize in advance, then slapped her hard on both cheeks. After slapping her he backed away a few steps and made yet another profound obeisance, as a judge, after performing a painful duty, might salute a prisoner of high degree.

But now she was in too great haste to linger long over memories, or anything else. She hurried on to the house. Tearful, smiling, but on the very edge of sobs, she rang the door bell. Too impatient to wait she entered and walked into the sitting room. The same old sitting room, and changed but little since she saw it last. On the walls the same green paper, just a little more faded, perhaps, at certain places where the morning sun had loitered. Almost covering the center table were books, papers and magazines.

Joanna entered. The greetings were cordial. Then, for a few moments they sat facing each other, Ruth in an arm chair, Joanna on the old sofa.

In a casual way, Ruth remarked:

"I suppose Cyrus is out in the old barn, hard at work on his new machine."

"Not now. It is all finished."

"Is it there now,—the machine?"

"No, he went away in it."

"When did he go?"

"Last night."

"Where has he gone?"

"I don't know."

Ruth leaned back in her chair and the color left her face.

"Oh, Miss Ruth, are you ill?"

"No, no! I am not ill. But didn't he say when he was coming back?"

"He said he might not be back for some days. But he has often done that."

Ruth suddenly jumped from her chair, began walking about the room, and exclaimed:

"He's a contemptible thing!"

"Not Cyrus?"

"Yes, Cyrus. And what a fool! Oh, what a fool!"

Into Joanna's placid, serious face came a look of amazement.

"You don't mean to say, Miss Ruth, that, Cyrus—is a—contemptible—thing and—and a fool!"

"That's just exactly what I mean. He's a fool—a contemptible, weak, half-hearted, easily discouraged, stupid fool!"

Ruth was clearly excited. She spoke rapidly and with vehemence, marching to and fro as if lashed to fury by some strange obsession. As Joanna watched the little figure she could hardly believe that this was the ever gentle Ruth Heywood of her acquaintance.

Ruth went on: "Not a speck of perseverance! And what a coward! I never suspected he was such a hopeless coward!"

"Cyrus a coward! Oh, but—Miss Ruth, you really——"

"Of course he's a coward! Why has he run away? Do brave men run away? No. Cowards run away. A mean, contemptible thing. That covers it. A contemptible cowardly act by a contemptible, cowardly man. And so ungrateful! Even as a boy he was ungrateful."

Now, to Joanna, who had known Cyrus intimately since the age of seven, he was the one perfect thing in creation. Morally he was an example for the angels; mentally the wonder of the age. So, being a somewhat literal person, these words came like stabs from a dagger and struck deep into her own heart. But she answered—more in sadness than in anger:

"I really can't imagine anybody thinking Cyrus ungrateful."

"Well, I do! He has no real love for anybody but himself. He thinks only of himself; only of himself!"

"Why, Miss Ruth, when Mrs. Eagan was laid up for nearly a whole summer, years ago, Cyrus took her a bowl of ice cream himself, every Sunday, after our own dinner. We had ice cream once a week. He was nothing but a boy then, but he——"

"Of course he did! Why not? Any boy would carry ice cream—just for the sake of holding it."

Joanna shook her head. "No. All boys are not like that."

Here Ruth turned fiercely upon her. "And how do you know he did? He probably ate it himself before

he got to Mrs. Eagan's. He would tell you he didn't, of course. He's an awful liar and always was. You know that, Joanna, as well as I do."

"Liar! No, no, Miss Ruth! You don't know him. He got entirely over that, years ago. He's as truthful as anybody. Long ago, before he went away to school, his father made him ashamed of his lies and——"

"Oh, for a time perhaps! Bad boys don't become good over night."

"But, Miss Ruth, please listen. You only knew him when you were both very young. He really cured himself. He has not lied since. He was too young to know better. But even with his lying he was always a good boy."

"A good boy! Ha! He was not a good boy. I knew him better than you did. He was like all other boys and no boys are good. They are nothing but little pirates, prize fighters, screaming, noisy Indians, because they are savages themselves. They have no honor. They worship criminals and always want the criminal to escape, because they are criminals themselves. And Cyrus was just like the others. Good indeed! He was always evil minded."

"Evil minded! Cyrus evil minded!"

Ruth stopped, and stood before Joanna. "I tell you he's bad—just bad. As a boy he was bad, as a man he is bad—treacherous, cowardly, mean spirited and absolutely dishonorable. And that's why I hate him!"

For a moment, with angry eyes and quivering lips

she stood looking down into the other woman's puzzled face. Then, dropping to her knees, she buried her face in Joanna's lap.

"Oh, I am so unhappy! So unhappy! Let me die!"

Joanna understood. Although unemotional herself she knew how to sympathize with the passion torn woman at her knees. Her own calm spirit and soothing words had their effect, and Ruth was soon herself again.

"And now, dearie," said Joanna, "I am going to bring you a cup of tea."

Alone in the green sitting room Ruth seated herself beside the center table. This table held, with other things, several books and papers, one or two mechanical drawings, some magazines and books. One of these books was lying open, just before her. A paragraph at the top of one of the open pages was marked in pencil. Being a scientific book Cyrus must have marked it. At that moment any thought of interest to him appealed to Ruth as something sanctified by his absence, a special message to herself. Besides, that the book should be lying open at this particular page seemed to her over wrought spirit as if placed there by Cyrus himself for her to read.

Had she stopped to think she would have known the open book was accidental, as she was the last person whom Cyrus could expect to visit him. But Fate and Providence do strange things than fiction dares invent.

Carefully she read the marked passage, in a reverent

spirit, as she would read a farewell message from a departed friend. It said :

"All sounds from earth are drifting forever into space. A strain of music will reach, in time, the most distant star. The music of the spheres is not an empty phrase. We know that wherever light will travel those waves that carry light through space will carry sound. Messages from other planets, for all we know, are reaching us to-day, but we are not attuned to hear them. Our own little song, or prayer, may reach the farthest star, but for its reception the sender and recipient must be in true accord."

With quivering hands she clutched the book, held it up before her eyes, and read the words again. Then she dropped the book upon the table and started up. In her eyes was a new light.

"But for its reception," she repeated, "the sender and recipient must be in true accord!"

In true accord! Yes, she and Drowsy were in true accord, even as children. If there was one person in this world specially endowed by Providence to receive such a message, surely it was Drowsy; he who received even the unspoken thoughts of others! She recalled her wonderment as a child when her whispered message was understood by him, at his own home, nearly a mile away. It seemed to her then,—and now—a supernatural gift. And if this author were correct no distance, however vast, would be an obstacle.

When Joanna returned with the tea she found her patient again in a state of excitement, but excitement

of another kind. This time it was the thrill of a new hope; the exhilaration of a great joy.

Late that night, when this world—and other worlds, it seemed—were silent, Ruth went out into the darkness. Down at the further end of the long garden, she stood, for a time, looking up into the heavens. The storm had passed. Slowly, from the west, great clouds were drifting across a black but starry sky. She shuddered at the thought of a human being far out in that frigid, infinite waste, a helpless wanderer,—dead perhaps,—and driven by her own act!

Her eyes sought vainly to delve into the solemn spaces between the stars. Who could believe a human voice or a thought could penetrate those black, appalling depths? But she remembered the sentence,

“All sounds from earth are drifting forever into space.”

Then, looking up toward the ruddy planet, and putting her one absorbing thought into fewest words, she said in a low voice, but clearly spoken:

“Cyrus, come back. I have always loved you.”

Three times she repeated it; and each time with an overflowing heart.

If, among the undiscovered forces between other worlds and ours, there moves, like waves of light, a

psychic power intensified by human love, repentance and devotion, then this woman's message should reach the uttermost limits of celestial space. Her very soul was in it.



XXI

ABOVE THE CLOUDS

RUTH'S first night on duty at the hospital, ten days later, was eventful.

She had the care of two patients, each in a room by himself, with an open door between. One of these patients was a man with a broken arm, a displaced rib, a bandaged head and wandering brain. He made no trouble and was perfectly quiet, except an occasional mumbling to himself.

The other patient, the one who appealed more strongly to her sympathies, was a boy about fifteen. Both legs had been broken in an automobile collision and he was suffering from internal injuries. In spite of constant pain his courage never weakened. He was always in good spirits and trying his best to smile.

His gratitude for any attention went straight to the heart of his nurse:—"That pretty little nurse with the sad face" as one surgeon described her.

Ruth was much impressed by Dr. Gladwin, a tall, heavy man, with a bushy head of the whitest hair. His eyes were threatening, his glance warlike, all in amusing contrast, however, to his friendly, cheerful voice, his gentle manners and his unfailing sympathy. He said to her that evening, after giving his instructions:

"We have not been able to define precisely this boy's injuries. The constant pain about his chest is a bad sign, but we are hoping for the best. His legs will be as good as ever."

While these words were spoken Ruth looked across the room toward the patient. His eyes were closed. The round boyish face was drawn with pain. At that moment his eyes opened and he returned Ruth's look with a smile. It was a smile of friendliness and courage, the resolute, pathetic courage of youth clinging to life. The look itself and the tale it told brought a sudden moistness to the eyes of the new nurse. Then she followed Dr. Gladwin into the adjoining room.

Standing by the bedside of the other patient she looked down upon a man whose eyes were partly covered by the bandage about his head. The pale face had the somewhat disreputable appearance that goes with a scrubby, unshaven chin.

"This man," said the doctor, "has, as you know, a broken arm and rib, with an injury to his head. He remains unconscious. The first few days he made

no effort to speak. But now he murmurs something at intervals; always the same words, I am told. The effort to speak is a favorable sign in this case, as it indicates a returning memory. He will probably recover."

A few further instructions as to her own duties, and he departed.

Ruth found the boy more greedy for companionship than the unconscious patient—which was not surprising. No human being could be braver than this boy. Yearning for sympathy he liked to have his hand held by this new nurse. As the night wore on he told her in a fragmentary way, between periods of pain, of his parents in San Francisco, of his ambitions, if he ever recovered. He also gave details of his accident last Saturday, just how he was thrown from the motor when they collided with the other car.

But the new nurse did not neglect the less interesting patient in the next room. He seemed like one in a deep, unending sleep, except for the occasional smile that came to his lips and the muttered words—whatever they were.

About two o'clock in the morning the boy closed his eyes and he, also, slept. Ruth arranged the covering about his neck and shoulders then stepped gently into the adjoining room. For a moment she stood at the bedside of the unconscious man with the scrubby chin. He lay motionless, and in a slumber so deep, so silent, that it seemed to Ruth he could easily pass away and none be wiser. Then, for a time, she stood

at the open window, looking out into the peaceful summer night and up at the stars. Her thoughts, when alone these days, were always in the past, and they were heart breaking. To-night, even the rising moon, although in its fullest beauty, seemed a perfect symbol of her own future—a world of dust and ashes.

At last, with a sigh of resignation—a sigh of despair and buried hopes—she left the window. Again she stood beside the unconscious and less interesting patient; he of the bandaged head and scrubby chin. As she was turning away she noticed a movement of his lips—the beginning of the periodic smile. She felt a sudden curiosity to hear the coming words. If, as the doctor said, they were always the same, they might be a message he had wished to send, important to wife or parents, that could lead to his identification. Besides she had a strong desire to learn what words or what thought behind the words—could bring so much happiness, even momentarily, to a half conscious spirit.

The light in the room, while softened by shades, was clear enough to reveal the uncovered portion of his face. And, as she looked more carefully, the face was less “common” than she had judged from the unshaven chin. She leaned over the bed, her face not far from his, and listened. Through the open window came no sound from the sleeping city; only the pale light from the rising moon; that cold, dead world of dust and ashes. It may have been the solitude and the silence of the hour that brought to Ruth a feeling of awe—almost of guilt at this intru-

sion upon the privacy of another's thoughts; secrets, perhaps, of a defenseless brain. As she was wondering what sort of accident had brought him there the blissful smile became more pronounced. Although his eyes were partly covered by the overhanging bandage it was clear that the dormant spirit within was stirred by memories of a supreme happiness, of a transcendent joy that no physical pain could extinguish.

Further still she bent over, until her face was near his own.

Then, through every nerve of brain and body, she felt a sensation of mingled awe, of terror, of bewilderment, as if she were suddenly in touch with another world, when she heard, hardly above a whisper :

"Cyrus, come back. I have—always—loved you."

Breathless, as in a trance, Ruth gazed at the lips, where lingered—but slowly fading, as if reluctant to pass away—the expression of a great content. The brief liberty of a rapturous thought. Then back into the darkness.

Needless to say that Cyrus Alton was not neglected during his convalescence. And Dr. Gladwin's prophecy was correct. Cyrus not only recovered but his recovery, after once regaining consciousness, was surprisingly rapid. So rapid that the "little nurse with the

sad face" threw aside her sadness, as if waking from a dream, and became the happiest and most inspiring person in her vicinity.

On a certain afternoon, when the convalescent was first allowed to talk as much as he wished, he told his story. And no better audience could be desired than the one then seated on the bed beside him, and quite near the speaker—perhaps to save him the effort of raising his voice. The day was warm, the windows open. Faintly through the closed blinds came the murmur of the city, from beyond the spacious grounds of the hospital.

The story was simply told. He started at night for the red planet. He got there and he landed. The air seemed much like ours. But he found himself in a world quite different from his own. All was architecture; temples, towers and enormous viaducts fading away into the horizon, as far as the eye could see. And everything was tall and slender. The trees were very high with branches pointing upward like poplars, and always formally laid out in avenues, or in geometric patterns. And the color! It was like looking at an endless city through orange glasses. The few people he saw had larger heads than ours, more like children, but like children with very short legs. They were surprisingly light on their feet. He was surprised at their high jumps until he remembered that a man who weighs two hundred pounds on the earth weighs but seventy-five pounds on Mars. He really saw but little, however, for although he had tested the atmosphere he

found, after looking about him a moment, that the air, while pleasant enough to breath, was affecting his nerves and brain, almost like laughing gas. Then, as he stood there, and began to realize his danger, the wonderful thing happened!

Like a soft whisper it came to his ears; gently but clearly, the words that made him forget the things about him,—and all else, for that matter. He thought, at first, the lighter air was affecting his nerves and exciting his imagination; that his own brain was fooling him. For he knew, or thought he knew, that such a thing was impossible. But as he stood there, wondering, hoping, trying hard to believe it might be possible, the message came again, in the same words. Then he knew it was no delusion. He knew it was no invention of his own, nor the cry from his own heart of its one desire.

“And, oh, Ruthy, it was the best news that ever came to that planet!”

After various remarks of a not impersonal nature from his audience, he continued:

“And to think of its getting there! I knew it was possible, theoretically, but I didn’t really believe it. Three times it came. Then I wasted no more time in wondering. I clambered back into the machine. Foreign countries had no further interest for me!

Foreign countries indeed!” and Ruth closed her eyes, and shuddered.

“Well,” the traveler continued, “I reached home at night, as you know.”

"Reached home!"

He laughed. "That shows how relative all things are, doesn't it? By home I meant the Earth. I traveled as fast as I dared for I wanted to meet somebody at Longfields. Instead of coming down over North America I found I was sailing up over the Eastern coast of Africa. When at last I struck Massachusetts, I met a thunderstorm. Any fool would know better than to stay out in it, but I was in a hurry to get to Longfields—where I had important business—and I took a chance. I was nearing Worcester when the storm struck me I had run into it, not realizing how fast I was going."

"Yes, yes—go on!"

"Well, I shall never know just what happened. I don't even know what became of the machine. The next thing I did know I was in this bed, and you beside it. Until you spoke to me and I heard your voice I believed I was dreaming."

"What do you think did happen, Drowsy?"

"I think a touch of lightning, an electric shock of some kind, knocked me silly, burst the door open and sent me heels over head out of the falling machine."

Then Ruth told him how he was found in a field, the ground, not far away, all dug up, a big tree splintered and a stone wall torn to pieces.

"Yes, yes—it probably took a run for a high jump, went off into space and is now about a thousand billion miles the other side of Neptune."

"Thank heaven, it's gone!" exclaimed Ruth. And

obeying a sudden impulse she leaned over and kissed the happy man.

At that moment Dr. Gladwin entered from the adjoining room. Quickly Ruth straightened up and backed away, her cheeks redder than roses.

The old doctor laughed, his face aglow with a boyish delight. "Don't let me interrupt, for that's what makes the world go round. Doesn't it, Mr. Alton?"

"Yes, Doctor. It always has and it will, forever and forever."

"True, indeed! And how far above science, electrical, medical and any other kind, or any human invention—even yours."

"There's no comparison," said the smiling patient.

"And what a heaven-sent cure for a damaged head and arm and ribs!"

"And a damaged heart," said Cyrus, waving a hand toward the rosy Ruth. "It's more than a cure. It's a continuous miracle!"

Here the much embarrassed Ruth interrupted: "Please don't think, Dr. Gladwin, that——"

"That you treat other patients as kindly? Oh, never!"

"God forbid!" exclaimed Cyrus.

"I want you to know," Ruth persisted, "that in September there is to be a——"

Dr. Gladwin nodded. "Wedding. Yes, I knew it."

"You knew it!"

"Several days ago."

"Why, who told you?"

"You both told me."

"We both told you!" exclaimed nurse and patient as they stared first at each other, then at the doctor.

"Some days ago," said Dr. Gladwin, with a serious face and impressive manner, "a certain nurse was waiting for me at my office—early in the morning. She told me she had discovered the identity of a certain patient. Her voice was tremulous. One hand she pressed tight against her heart to silence its beating. She knew, as I did, that loud reverberations might awaken sleeping neighbors. She had eyes. Possibly you have noticed those eyes, Mr. Alton."

"I live in them," said Cyrus.

"Well, deep, down deep within those eyes I could see the Thing that makes the world go round; the tender, unchanging glow that is life to a broken lover."

Here Cyrus smiled, nodded, gulped, started to say something and gave it up.

Dr. Gladwin continued. "She did not tell me she hoped that particular patient would recover. She told me he *must* recover. She made it clear that nothing in this world, or in any other world, was to be considered until that young man was out of danger."

"Oh, how can you make fun of me!" protested Ruth.

"Make fun of you! Make fun of the most sacred thing in human life!"

"No, Ruth," said Cyrus, "he is not making fun of you. He is simply reciting the most beautiful of all earthly poems."

"Yes, he speaks truly," said the doctor: "the oldest in the world yet always young. An entrancing poem, containing also the secret of the young man with the broken head. But he hides his secret in a louder way. He sings it to any listener—and all day long."

"Oh, come now," from Cyrus. "I say, Doctor, you——"

Ruth laughed. "Don't interrupt. Please go right on, Doctor. It's just lovely!"

Dr. Gladwin obeyed. "Metaphorically he engages an auditorium and a military band to announce the coming tidings. Then, to the assembled multitude, he shouts the joyful secret. But when alone with me, those public methods are not necessary. If I mention, in a casual way, the nurse with the eloquent eyes, the color rushes into his pale face, his lips quiver, his eyes become moist and his pulse jumps and dances like a thing possessed.

Cyrus laughed and leaned back against his pillow. "Yes and ten times more so when I'm in her presence and can see her."

"Of course," said Dr. Gladwin, "a healthy, normal habit. Long life to it! There's no better way to impart the ever welcome tidings 'I am in love, and she's mine!' But what a tonic, this carefully guarded secret! Never, since the world began was cure so swift."

Then, in a more serious tone, but with his friendly smile:

"And all deserved! To both of you has come the high reward of Courage and Devotion."

Ruth returned his smile, the color still in her cheeks. Cyrus closed his eyes and breathed a sigh of fathomless content.

"It all seems too good to be true," he murmured.







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